

**PRESERVING FAITH AND CULTURE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH:
A TRI-COLLABORATIVE MODEL FOR TEACHING THE TRIPLE-HERITAGE
THROUGH THE AFRICAN AMERICAN SPIRITUALS**

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the Faculty of the
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**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by
Yolanda Yvette Smith**

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Yolanda Yvette Smith

*under the direction of _____ her _____ Faculty Committee, and
approved by its members, has been presented to and
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Claremont in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Faculty Committee

Mary Elizabeth Mullins Moore
Chairperson

Karen Beck-Fitzgerald

Michelle Rosta

Frank R. J.

Date

May 15, 1998

Yolanda Yvette Smith

ABSTRACT

Preserving Faith and Culture in the African American Church: A Tri-Collaborative Model for Teaching the Triple-Heritage Through the African American Spirituals

by

Yolanda Yvette Smith

The educational ministries of many African American churches do not fully reflect the triple-heritage (African, African American and Christian) of African Americans. An imbalance in church curriculum occurs when one aspect of the heritage (e.g., Christian doctrines or African American history) is emphasized over the others (e.g., African roots). Consequently, African Americans are in danger of losing valuable aspects of their heritage. Churches, however, can enlarge their triple-heritage teaching and curriculum design by focusing on African American spirituals as paradigms for Christian education. This dissertation focuses on the African American spirituals as sources for teaching the triple-heritage.

The triple-heritage is explored holistically, with attention to the distinctive components and how they are interwoven. A contextual description and analysis is also done through an historical review of education in African and African American communities, a discussion of contemporary educational trends in the African American church, a critical examination of congregational studies on black Sunday Schools identified as successful, and a comparative analysis of four curriculum resources.

Moreover, the spirituals are identified as embodiments of the triple-heritage and as sources for deeper insights into the theology and function of the spirituals in the African American church. Characteristics of the spirituals such as the call and response, creative imagery, and biblical content suggest educational qualities like dialogue, imagination and narrative that are inherent within the spirituals. Such qualities can assist educators in determining subject matter and creative approaches to the educational process.

In an effort to examine the unique relationship between theology and Christian education, an in-depth study is conducted into Black theology, Womanist theology and the theology of the spirituals. Insights for a triple-heritage model of Christian education are explicated.

Lastly, this dissertation proposes a model of Christian education that incorporates the spirituals as a way of experiencing, expressing and teaching the triple-heritage. Through the spirituals, the church can be equipped to teach not only the Christian faith but the full heritage of African American people.

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INTRODUCTION

Christian education from an African American perspective is particularly interesting to me because of the variety of experiences that I have had (good and bad) in the public school system and through my involvement in Sunday School as well as other Christian education programs within the church. Most of my secular education has been in predominantly Anglo schools. In the early years of my life, I found that the public school system was able to provide me with basic academic skills, but it was not able to address my cultural needs. African Americans as well as many other minorities were either left out of the curriculum altogether, or they were portrayed negatively whenever they were included. I always came away from this experience struggling to create a positive self-image as well as an appreciation for my heritage.

Throughout my childhood, my family attended an Anglo church. Although it was at this church, at the age of seventeen, that I eventually experienced a spiritual conversion and made a commitment to God, this experience was not enough to address my identity crisis, or to instill in me a sense of pride and appreciation for my heritage.

When I entered college I began to attend an African American church and, for the first time, I felt that I was at home. I felt like I belonged, and I knew that I had finally found the source of my true identity. In this

church I saw African American men and women who were successful role models, who were prominent figures in the community and who had a great sense of pride in their heritage.

During my early years at this church, I had a deep desire to learn more about God, especially in light of my African American heritage. I found, however, the educational ministry of the church, like others that I had attended, was inadequate for this need. For instance, there was usually only one teaching method used in the classes: the lecture method. The majority of the class time was spent either listening to the lecture or reading through the Sunday School book without any time for exploration or reflection on the biblical text. More importantly, there was often a heavy emphasis on Christian doctrine without much attention to our heritage. Moreover, while there was a concern for personal and spiritual application of the lessons, there was little emphasis, in the classroom, on social action within the community.

African American Christians have the unique privilege of possessing what Dr. Warren H. Stewart, Sr., Pastor of the First Institutional Baptist Church of Phoenix, Arizona, refers to as a "triple-heritage."¹ This heritage

¹ Dr. Stewart is also the founder of the African American Christian Training School (AACTS) at the First Institutional Baptist Church of Phoenix. This is a Saturday school that provides a special program of study through the church, for children in kindergarten through tenth grade. The school has

encompasses the African, African American and Christian roots of African American people. As Africans, African Americans can draw upon the rich heritage of their motherland (such as tribal customs, naming ceremonies, rituals, music, dance, literature and family structure); as African Americans they can draw from the legacy of sheroes and heroes who have literally built this country upon their backs and as Christians they can draw from the foundation of their faith. Unfortunately, the educational ministries of many African American churches do not reflect the triple-heritage fully in their curriculum. Often churches place a heavy emphasis on one area of the heritage (e.g., Christian doctrines or African American history) while neglecting the others (e.g., African roots). Consequently, African Americans are in danger of losing valuable aspects of their heritage.

Christian Education and The Triple-Heritage

Although the literature on Christian education from an African American perspective is limited, it is encouraging that African American Christian educators are now beginning to write in this area. This scholarship is significant for three reasons: it focuses on Christian education that arises out of and reflects the African American experience; it provides a critical analysis of

been in operation for approximately five years, and features a curriculum that emphasizes African, American and Christian resources.

Christian education in the African American church; and it offers some practical suggestions for equipping pastors, church leaders, Christian educators and teachers to serve their churches more effectively.

In his article entitled "Christian Education: A Black Church Perspective," James H. Harris emphasizes the importance of African Americans knowing their heritage.

The church must develop programs to enable black children and adults to become culturally literate, teaching the importance of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, W. E. B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, Nat Turner, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the countless others who have labored for freedom and justice. We need to learn our own history and the value of our contributions to the development of society and the quest for freedom.²

Harris contends that the church must not only take an active role in providing biblical teachings, but it must also incorporate African American history as well as current social concerns. He goes on to suggest that this afrocentric approach must encompass all aspects of the church's ministry such as worship, choir rehearsals and performances, outreach activities, auxiliary/board meetings, evangelism and discipleship. Cooperation from the church and community is needed in order to carry out this endeavor successfully.

One African American scholar who is breaking new ground in the area of Christian education is Anne S. Wimberly,

² James H. Harris, "Christian Education: A Black Church Perspective," Christian Ministry, July-Aug. 1991, 17.

professor of Christian Education and Church Music at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia. In her book Soul Stories: African American Christian Education, Wimberly introduces an innovative approach to Christian education that centers around the experiences of African American people and embraces the oral tradition of storytelling. This contemporary model of Christian education is unique in that it "reclaims" a vital part of the African American culture.³

Like Harris, Wimberly emphasizes the need for churches to incorporate African American history as well as concerns for social action into their Christian education programs. Although Harris cites examples of churches that are teaching African American history and taking an active role in addressing community concerns, he does not offer a model for doing Christian education from an African American perspective. Wimberly, on the other hand, offers a new paradigm for doing Christian education. She explores the themes of liberation, vocation and ethical decision making through story-linking, a process she defines as tying together personal stories, biblical stories and faith heritage stories from the African American tradition.⁴

In this model of Christian education, Wimberly

³ Anne S. Wimberly, Soul Stories: African American Christian Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 13-14.

⁴ Wimberly, 39.

emphasizes the African American and the Christian aspects of the triple-heritage. By joining together these foundational stories she explores the experiences of African American people in light of their Christian faith from the time of their arrival in this country until the present time.⁵

Joseph V. Crockett, former Professor of Ministry and Black Church Studies at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Rochester, New York, is another African American scholar who is making a significant contribution to the field of Christian education. Crockett agrees with both Harris and Wimberly regarding teaching scriptures in light of the unique experiences and traditions of African Americans. In his book Teaching Scripture from an African American Perspective, Crockett emphasizes cultural integrity, which he defines as a "respect for the particular experiences and traditions of African Americans."⁶ Although Crockett does not develop a paradigm for a Christian education program, as Wimberly does, he does introduce four strategies for teaching scripture in an African American context. These

⁵ Continuing this emphasis, Wimberly along with other scholars also draw upon African American culture and religious traditions to explore a new model of ministry to older adults. This model emphasizes the importance of recognizing the contributions of older adults as well as caring for their needs. See Anne S. Wimberly, Honoring African American Elders: A Ministry in the Soul Community (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997).

⁶ Joseph V. Crockett, Teaching Scripture from an African American Perspective (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1990), xii.

strategies are: (1) the story strategy which emphasizes the oral tradition of storytelling in the African American community; (2) the exile strategy that examines the impact of forced relocation and bondage of the African American people; (3) the sanctuary strategy that explores the communal characteristics of worship in the African American community; and (4) the exodus strategy that stimulates critical social reflection and involvement.⁷

The work of these scholars is promising. This growing body of research seeks to address the needs of the African American church by emphasizing the importance of Christian education programs that are culturally sensitive, combine biblical teachings with African American history and promote social action within the community. Further research, however, is needed in this area in order to develop new visions and new programs, to refine existing programs and to move the church towards a more holistic ministry of Christian education.

While the current literature is helpful, it is somewhat limited in that it focuses exclusively on the African American and Christian experiences. It does not include a Pan African perspective which is vital to promoting the triple-heritage. Although Wimberly focuses on the oral tradition of storytelling in the African American community, she does not broaden her discussion to include the African

⁷ Crockett, Teaching Scripture, 1-2, 15-17, 27-31, 39-41.

roots of this tradition. Likewise, Harris' challenge to the church to become culturally literate falls short of examining the impact of the African heritage on the African American experience. Like Wimberly and Harris, Crockett focuses primarily on the African American and Christian experiences. Although he incorporates traditional African concepts as the basis for his strategies, he does not go beyond the African American experience in his analysis and implementation of these strategies.

As an African American Christian educator, I believe that it is important to explore our full heritage in order to teach Christian education from an African American perspective. This includes delving deeply into our African heritage in order to prepare ourselves adequately to address the present and future educational needs of the church. An African proverb beautifully summarizes this notion. It states, "To go back to tradition is the first step forward." Nsenga Warfield-Coppock sheds light on this proverb:

The Akan tradition exemplifies this ancient wisdom with the symbol of the Sankafo Bird. This bird . . . has a long neck which stretches backward to its tail. It stands on three steps and the words that go with this symbol are "go and fetch it." To go back to the ancient wisdom of our African ancestors we can learn what is in front of us and what it is that we should be doing--our ancestors will lead the way if only we let them.*

Drawing upon the wisdom of this African proverb, we are

* Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, Adolescent Rites of Passage, vol. 1 of Afrocentric Theory and Applications (Washington, D.C.: Baobab Associates, 1990), 8.

reminded that as we return to our historical roots we can learn much about the rich faith tradition that is uniquely ours. As we embrace this tradition we will gain valuable insight into our heritage, our faith tradition and our understanding of who we are as African people in the diaspora.

Janice Hale further builds upon this point when she states, "In order to understand faith in African American culture, we must explore and analyze the roots of African American culture in general, and we must consider the religious experience of African Americans by beginning with the African heritage."⁹ To emphasize this point, she goes on to cite Jack Daniel and Geneva Smitherman who agree that beginning with the African heritage is essential since the African American culture is strongly influenced and "colored" by a traditional African world view.¹⁰

Likewise, in The Spirituality of African Peoples, Peter Paris convincingly argues for the recognition of the "African factor" in the African American experience when he states, "The African American experience cannot be fully understood apart from its ongoing connectedness with the

⁹ Janice E. Hale, "The Transmission of Faith to Young African American Children," in The Recovery of Black Presence: An Interdisciplinary Exploration, eds. Randall C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 193.

¹⁰ Hale, 193.

religious and moral ethos of its African homeland."¹¹

I agree that a full understanding of who we are as African Americans is rooted in our African heritage. To neglect this part of our heritage would be to neglect an important part of who we are. We must not stop with our African American experience, but we must reach all the way back to our African roots. As we learn about our African roots, we can build upon various aspects of our African heritage such as tribal customs and practices, music, dance, art and religious understandings as a basis for developing Christian education ministries from an African American perspective.

An example of using African concepts to design a Christian education program can be seen in the work of Nigerian educator, A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, formerly Associate Professor of Religious Education at United Theological Seminary. In his dissertation, On Communitarian Divinity and Religious Education: A Perspective from an African Worldview, he sets forth a theory of Religious education that draws upon the African understanding of God as communal and relational. According to Ogbonnaya, "communitarian education is grounded in the concept of the

¹¹ Peter J. Paris, The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 20.

Divine as community and in communitarian humanity."¹² He further suggests that "religious education is grounded in relational experiences which form the referential totality for continual human interaction."¹³ In short, this theory of education focuses on the centrality of community and relationships within the Godhead, as well as within the human community. This model of religious education emphasizes mutuality, understanding and interplay, while embracing various African practices such as music, dance, ritual, metaphors, stories, symbols, myths, legends, and proverbs. Thus, in this educational community, fashioned after an African understanding of God, everyone is equal, everyone is related, everyone is respected and everyone functions as both teacher and learner.

Another example of using African concepts and practices to shape African American educational ministries is the rites of passage programs for adolescents that are sweeping the African American church and community. These programs are currently being established throughout the country in an effort to restore a sense of empowerment to African American communities and to provide a positive sense of self and achievement in African American youth.

¹² A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, On Communitarian Divinity and Religious Education: A Perspective from an African Worldview, Ph.D. diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1992 (Ann Arbor, UMI, 1992), 426-27.

¹³ Ogbonnaya, abstract of On Communitarian Divinity and Religious Education.

Rites of passage programs are sponsored by a variety of organizations, including churches, schools, community agencies, fraternal organizations and civic groups. Families have also come together to guide youth through the rites of passage process. Rites of passage programs typically consist of three general phases of initiation: separation--for educational purposes; test/trial--the actual public ritual; and incorporation--the public reception into the community. In order to reach the final initiation, youth are often required to complete a series of difficult activities. Once these activities are successfully completed, a special ceremony is often held to mark the official acceptance of the youth into her/his society. The rites of passage process, thus, follows the general pattern found in many parts of the world.¹⁴

In the African American church and community, rites of passage programs are usually African-centered, embracing African principles of education and socialization. They are also culturally based, drawing upon both African and African American culture. Most of the programs incorporate the

¹⁴ Bruno Bettelheim, Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 16-18; Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 2-3, 10-11. See also A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde, eds. African Systems of Kinship and Marriage (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950).

Nguzo Saba or Seven Principles of Blackness,¹⁵ designed by Maulana Karenga and used as guidelines for observing Kwanzaa, an African American cultural celebration. In the rites of passage program these principles serve as practical guidelines for living while building a positive sense of self. These principles, along with other African and African American sources, provide the basis for the content, structure, activities and evaluation of these programs.

Additionally, rites of passage programs are life-centered. They are designed to address real life issues and concerns of African American girls and boys. Topics include African and African American History and culture, economic development, healthy living, physical fitness, foreign language skills (e.g., Swahili, Spanish, computer literacy), spirituality, Nguzo Saba mastery and application, sex education, manhood, womanhood, self-esteem, leadership

¹⁵ The Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles of Blackness) are: (1) Umoja (Unity) - "To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race"; (2) Kujichagulia (Self-determination) - "To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves"; (3) Ujima - (Collective Work and Responsibility) - "To build and maintain our community together"; (4) Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) - "To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together"; (5) Nia (Purpose) - "To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community"; (6) Kuumba (Creativity) - "To leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it"; and (7) Imani (Faith) - "To believe . . . in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle." For more information on the Nguzo Saba see Maulana Karenga, The African American Holiday of Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1988), 43-72.

development, community service, governmental procedures, college preparation, career development, music, dance, literature and art.

The length of most rites of passage programs is about a year. They usually begin with an induction ceremony for youth beginning at age eleven or twelve. Following the induction, youth participate in weekly or monthly classes, field trips, seminars, rap sessions, lectures and various other learning experiences. After completing numerous requirements, such as community projects, oral and written exams, essays and a demonstration of a certain level of maturity, youth participate in a ritual ceremony that represents their passage into womanhood/manhood. This ceremony is attended by family, friends and the extended community, who join in the celebration through song, dance, liturgy, presentation of gifts and a united commitment to nurture and support these youth throughout their life's journey.

In short, rites of passage programs are educationally based programs that are designed to assist African American youth in moving from one developmental stage (childhood) to the next (adulthood) so that they can become productive members of society.¹⁶

¹⁶ Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, "The Rites of Passage Movement: A Resurgence of African-Centered Practices for Socializing African American Youth," Journal of Negro Education 61, no. 4 (1992): 472.

Rites of passage programs in the African American community are typically based on the African concept of rites of passage which can be traced to Ancient Kemet (Egypt). In Stolen Legacy, George James notes that in ancient Egypt the initiation process was an intensive process that extended over several years. The curriculum was highly developed and incorporated a wide range of disciplines including mathematics, science, language, art, mysticism and social studies.¹⁷ What is unique about this program of study is that it has a strong emphasis on the development of virtuousness in an effort to bring about harmony with God, humanity and nature. These virtues are beneficial because they help to create a sense of responsibility, discipline and respect for oneself as well as for others.¹⁸

Rites of passage programs are particularly valuable today because they provide a holistic approach to education, addressing all aspects of the person as opposed to focusing predominantly on academics. They are also unique in that they embrace an African-centered pedagogy rather than the traditional Eurocentric modes of education.¹⁹ Moreover they can be particularly useful to the church because they

¹⁷ George G. M. James, Stolen Legacy (San Francisco: Julian Richardson Associates, 1986), 132-37.

¹⁸ James, 104-05.

¹⁹ Warfield-Coppock, "Rites of Passage Movement," 472.

are a means through which the African American church can begin to address the pressing needs of African American youth. Drawing upon ancient African tradition as well as contemporary African American cultural values, the rites of passage programs offer a viable alternative to the Hip-Hop and New Jack value systems that encourage drug abuse, violence, sexual promiscuity and gang activity among our youth.

With this in mind, I would like to build upon the current scholarship by suggesting that Christian education from an African American perspective can help African Americans embrace their full heritage through a well-rounded curriculum that incorporates all three aspects of the triple-heritage. Teaching the triple-heritage challenges the African American church to embrace its African heritage, encouraging African Americans to reclaim African history, culture and geography as their ancestral heritage; its African American heritage, illuminating the experience and significant contributions of African Americans in the United States; and its Christian heritage, affirming the fullness of Christian experience and the distinctiveness of African American Christianity. By teaching the triple-heritage African Americans can preserve and celebrate both their faith and their cultural heritage.

From this conviction, I desire to explore creative ways that the church can be involved in teaching the triple-

heritage of African Americans. Teaching the triple-heritage in a positive light can lead to a sense of pride in African American heritage and allow persons of the African diaspora to live with confidence, self-respect, dignity and freedom in society.

Teaching through the Spirituals: New Possibilities

One way to teach the triple-heritage creatively is through the African American spirituals. Since all three aspects of the triple-heritage have informed the spirituals, the spirituals can be used to explore the three streams of the triple-heritage. For example, African traditional music has influenced the rhythm, world view and spontaneous nature of the spirituals. The African American experience of slavery gave birth to the spirituals through the secret religious meetings, the work environment, and the harsh realities of bondage. And Christianity has inspired numerous theological themes in these songs, revealing the faith of a people who have endured great hardships and oppression. The spirituals, therefore, are a point of intersection where the three components of the triple-heritage come together, and where reflection on the triple heritage can begin.²⁰ A striking example is the spiritual "Steal Away." In it, the African component is seen in the hidden embedded meaning.

²⁰ See chapter 7 for a full discussion and diagram of how the triple-heritage comes together in the spirituals.

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus!
Steal away, steal away home,
I ain't got long to stay here!²¹

Wyatt Tee Walker, Lawrence W. Levine and John Lovell note that incorporating hidden or coded meanings in music is a common African practice designed to obscure the true meaning of a particular message or to critique certain situations.²² Thus, slaves incorporated a longstanding African custom when they used "Steal Away" as a signal for secret meetings or religious gatherings.²³ An examination of this spiritual and others may shed light on various African customs and practices and their carryovers in slave communities.

Likewise, "Steal Away" has an African American component in that it reflects the slaves' quest for survival

²¹ "Steal Away," in Songs of Zion (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 134.

²² Wyatt Tee Walker, "Somebody's Calling My Name": Black Sacred Music and Social Change (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979), 56, 58-59; Lawrence W. Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 7-10; John Lovell, Jr., Black Song: The Forge and the Flame (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972), 7-8, 40, 42, 45-46.

²³ Lovell, 379; Miles Mark Fisher, Negro Slave Songs in the United States (1953; reprint, New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1981), 66-67; James H. Cone, The Spirituals and the Blues (1972; reprint, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 15-16; William B. McClain, Come Sunday: The Liturgy of Zion (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 110-11; Harold A. Jackson, Jr., "The Negro Spiritual as Religious Expression and Historical Experience," Journal of the Blaisdell Institute 9, no. 1 (fall and winter 1973-74): 42-43; Harold A. Jackson, Jr., "The New Hermeneutic and the Understanding of Spirituals," Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center 33, no. 2 (spring 1976): 44-45.

and liberation.

My Lord calls me, He calls me by the thunder
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul,
I ain't got long to stay here.²⁴

This verse could have been a signal for an impending escape as the words "I ain't got long to stay here" seem to imply.²⁵ They thus point us to some of the creative ways that the slaves resisted slavery, the underground railroad led by Harriet Tubman being but one of the examples of successful efforts by slaves to free themselves.²⁶ In her efforts to guide the slaves to freedom, Tubman reportedly incorporated numerous spirituals including "Steal Away."²⁷ In a similar fashion, "Steal Away" played a significant role in Nat Turner's insurrection.²⁸ This spiritual was so integral to Turner's mission that he is considered to be the probable author of this song by scholars such as Miles Mark Fisher and Harold Jackson.²⁹

Moreover, "Steal Away" reflects the Christian component

²⁴ "Steal Away," in Songs of Zion, 134.

²⁵ Wyatt Walker, 58-59; Lovell, 125, 191, 196, 228.

²⁶ See Sarah Bradford, Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People (Secausus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1961); M. W. Taylor, Harriet Tubman (New York: Chelsea House, 1991).

²⁷ Lovell, 125, 379.

²⁸ Lovell, 196; Wyatt Walker, 59; Fisher, 66-67.

²⁹ Fisher, 66-67; Jackson, "New Hermeneutic," 45; Jackson, "Negro Spiritual as Religious Expression," 42. See also Cone, Spirituals and the Blues, 16.

by revealing the slaves' understanding of God. They saw Jesus as friend and liberator, and believed that God would one day deliver them from the bonds of slavery.

My Lord calls me, He calls me by the lightening,
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul,
I ain't got long to stay here.³⁰

By exploring the spirituals, then, African Americans can gain insight into their African roots, their African American history and their Christian faith.³¹

Of course the spirituals have been analyzed extensively from a variety of perspectives. For example, Lawrence W. Levine, John Lovell, Arnold Shaw and Eileen Southern have studied the history of the spirituals, tracing the development of these songs from their origins to contemporary times. These scholars have also examined the social and cultural factors that have played a significant role in shaping the spirituals.³² Dena J. Epstein has explored the origin of the African American spirituals, with particular attention to the direction of influence (i.e., black-to-white versus white-to-black) in the development of

³⁰ "Steal Away," in Songs of Zion, 134.

³¹ See chapters 5, 6 and 7 for a broader discussion of the spirituals as a source for exploring the triple-heritage.

³² Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness; Lovell, Black Song; Arnold Shaw, Black Popular Music in America: From the Spirituals, Minstrels, and Ragtime to Soul, Disco, and Hip-Hop (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986); Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans: A History (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971).

these songs."³³

Others have been particularly concerned with the social roles of the spirituals. James Cone and Jeremiah Wright have examined the spirituals as a cultural expression of black people. Cone focuses primarily on the significance of the spirituals for the black community, whereas Wright explores the use of the spirituals in worship, analyzing how God is understood through the theology of the spirituals.³⁴ Also concerned with social roles, Wyatt Tee Walker and Jon Michael Spencer have focused on the role of the spirituals in protest and social change.³⁵

Because the spirituals have played these social roles in the community, they reveal much about the people's lives --their pains, hopes and wisdom. Albert J. Raboteau has investigated slave narratives, black autobiographies, black folklore and the spirituals in order to examine the slaves'

³³ Dena J. Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977); Dena J. Epstein, "A White Origin for the Black Spirituals? An Invalid Theory and How It Grew," American Music 1, no. 2 (1983): 53-69.

³⁴ Cone, Spirituals and the Blues; Jeremiah Wright, Jr., "Music as Cultural Expression in Black Church Theology and Worship," Journal of Black Sacred Music 3, no. 1 (1989): 1-5.

³⁵ Wyatt Walker, Sombody's Calling My Name; Jon Michael Spencer, "Freedom Songs of the Civil Rights Movement," Journal of Black Sacred Music 1, no. 2 (1987): 1-16; Jon Michael Spencer, Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

religious experiences during slavery.³⁶ Howard Thurman and Arthur C. Jones have studied the religious meaning embodied in the spirituals in order to reflect on the moral and spiritual wisdom of the people.³⁷

Although much work has already been done on the spirituals, no one has studied the spirituals with the intent of identifying the triple-heritage reflected in them. My contribution to the current body of literature will be two-fold: a serious reflection on the triple-heritage embedded in the spirituals; and a proposed model of Christian education that is grounded in the triple-heritage and informed by the spirituals.

Thesis and Argument

Christian education from an African American perspective can help African Americans embrace their full heritage through a broad-based curriculum that uses the African American spirituals to explore all three aspects of their triple-heritage and the relationship among them. Teaching the triple-heritage will involve particular attention to the African heritage and continued African struggle for liberation; the African American heritage and

³⁶ Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

³⁷ Howard Thurman, Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death (1975; reprint, Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 1990); Arthur C. Jones, Wade In the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993).

the unique experience and contributions of African Americans; and Christian heritage, which includes the whole of Christian experience and the distinctiveness of African American Christianity. A triple-heritage model of Christian education will allow African Americans to teach their children the truth about their history, to provide a holistic ministry within the community and to preserve and celebrate both their faith and their culture.

My goal is not to make a sharp distinction among the three aspects of the triple-heritage; rather, my intention is to show that they are closely related and that they are intimately intertwined. The triple-heritage is a unit with three vital components that together make up a unique whole. There is a dynamic relationship among the three elements: they draw upon one another, they flow out of each other and they build upon each other.

A metaphor that seems to capture the essence of the triple-heritage is that of three rivers.³⁸ Each river has its own place of origin and its own distinct characteristics. When they flow together, however, they create a new body of water and the distinctive characteristics of each can no longer be completely separated. For example, the African survivals that are still

³⁸ This metaphor emerged out of a brainstorming session with my committee chairperson, Mary Elizabeth Moore, who offered several metaphors that might help to clarify the relationship among the three aspects of the triple-heritage.

present today are not easily identified as African traditions or practices. Since they have been so immersed in the African American culture, sharp distinctions between the African elements and other African American traditions and practices are often difficult to discern.

It is important to remember that each aspect of the triple-heritage contributes something valuable and distinctive to the African American Christian heritage, and together they make up the whole heritage. While one aspect may be more dominant than the others, all three contribute uniquely to the whole. It is also important to remember that all three of the original streams have continued to flow in distinctive directions, as in the multitude of African, African American and Christian traditions; thus, distinctive streams continue to enrich the lives of African American Christian people.

In this dissertation, I will argue that the sources that naturally arise out of the African American tradition (e.g., music, dance, and folklore) can be a vehicle for teaching the triple-heritage. While there are numerous resources that could inform a curriculum that centers around the triple-heritage of African Americans, I have chosen to focus on the African American spirituals for several reasons. First, as noted above, the spirituals actually embody the triple-heritage. Maud Cuney Hare recognized this integration of tradition in the spirituals. While she

emphasized the African origins as the foundation of these songs, she also noted that the spirituals, which were born out of the American experience of slavery, were significantly shaped by Christian doctrine.”

Second, I am interested in exploring the spirituals because they easily lend themselves to critical analysis of the culture and reflection upon personal responsibility within the community. Walker and Spencer have pointed out that the spirituals have been used as a form of social critique. This critique can be seen in numerous songs that embody a spirit of protest and a challenge to bring about social transformation and change.

Third, the spirituals can enhance the educational ministry of the African American church by providing a means for exploring the triple-heritage in a way that allows all three aspects of the triple-heritage to be reflected fully in relation to each other. A full representation is essential, so that one aspect of the heritage does not dominate the curriculum while other aspects are lost. The aim is to see the triple-heritage as a whole, with interrelated components, rather than as three separate and distinct elements.

Fourth, by drawing upon the theology embodied in the

” Maud Cuney Hare, "The Source," in The Negro in Music and Art, ed. Lindsay Patterson, International Library of Negro Life and History (1935; reprint, New York: Publishers Company, 1967), 21-22.

spirituals, the church can reflect upon the movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the African American church. This reflection will shed light on how the church has been empowered by the Holy Spirit and inspired with a sense of hope for the future. This hope has allowed African Americans to envision liberation and freedom from oppression. The movement of the Holy Spirit through music and song united the slave community, provided comfort in the midst of hardship and deepened the churches' sense of spirituality.⁴⁰ A similar awareness of the movement of the Holy Spirit is needed in the church today. The church must continue to have a sense of hope, a commitment to fight injustice and oppression, and a passion for deepening its relationship with God. These elements come through the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, the spirituals can facilitate the church in moving towards a "Spirit-centered" education.⁴¹ For it is the Spirit of God that empowers the church as well as individuals to carry out the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ. This ministry reflects God's love, hope, peace, justice, healing and wholeness. The Holy Spirit is vital to the educational ministry of the church because an effective

⁴⁰ Melva Wilson Costen, African American Christian Worship (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 44-47.

⁴¹ Frank Rogers, "Dancing with Grace: Toward a Spirit-Centered Education," School of Theology at Claremont, Occasional Paper 1, no. 2 (1991): 5.

Christian education ministry must depend upon the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit; thus Christian education should be Spirit-centered education. Christian education begins with the Spirit of God and works in harmony with the Spirit to meet the needs of the church and community.

And finally, on a more personal note, I am drawn to the spirituals because they have inspired me in profound ways: they have enhanced my spiritual growth by giving me a deeper sense of the presence of God in my life and inspiring me to deepen my relationship with God; they have given me a sense of connection with, as well as a deeper respect for, my ancestors; they have allowed me to experience a deeper sense of community within the African American church; and they have helped me to gain a sense of pride in my African American heritage.

Method

In order to complete this project the following methods were incorporated.

1. An examination of the triple-heritage with particular attention to the definition and unique contribution of each element: This examination consists of a review of the existing literature on African heritage, African American heritage and Christian heritage in the African American church.

2. A critical analysis of the current educational ministries of African American churches consisting of an

historical overview of African American Christian education, a study of contemporary educational trends in the African American church, an analysis of five of Sid Smith's congregational studies on successful black Sunday Schools; and an evaluation of four curriculum resources designed for, and currently being used by, African American churches.

3. An historical, cultural and theological analysis of the spirituals drawing primarily upon secondary sources, some primary sources, when available, and an in-depth examination of several spirituals.

4. An analysis of the relationship between theology and Christian education conducted through an in-depth study of Black theology, Womanist theology, and the theology embodied in the spirituals. Insights are drawn for a triple-heritage model of Christian education.

5. A presentation of a proposed model of Christian education that is grounded in the triple-heritage and informed by the spirituals including an analysis of the major components of a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model of Christian education; suggestions for exploring the triple-heritage through the spirituals; and recommendations for further research.

Scope and Limitations

This dissertation examines the use of the spirituals to inform a model of Christian education designed to teach the triple-heritage of African Americans. The purpose of this

discussion is to explore the wealth of information that can be drawn from the spirituals as a source for teaching the triple-heritage and as a guide to the process of education. Definitions, historical backgrounds, characteristics, sources, functions and the theological understandings revealed in the spirituals are examined.

The primary focus is Christian education from an African American perspective; thus the study includes an evaluation of educational practices and curriculum designed for African American churches. The spirituals analyzed in this study are primarily from the antebellum period. At times, however, more contemporary versions of the spirituals are cited. A brief discussion of how the spirituals have influenced contemporary American life is also included.

Importance of the Dissertation

Although the spirituals have been studied in a variety of ways, few have explored the educational value of the spirituals and how they function socially in the African American community. More specifically, no published works reflect on the spirituals as a source of teaching the triple-heritage or as a guide for the content and process of education.

Therefore, this study is important for several reasons. It will provide valuable information on the socio-historical context, cultural influences and theological underpinnings within the spirituals, thus facilitating the church in

teaching the triple-heritage. It will illustrate how the spirituals can be used in an educational setting. It will offer a model for drawing upon African American cultural resources for learning about the triple-heritage. It will also encourage individuals from other cultures (e.g., Asian, Latinos, and other racial/ethnic groups) to adapt a similar process for learning about their own particular cultures. It will benefit Christian education by providing a curriculum model that highlights all three aspects of the triple-heritage. Finally, it will benefit secular education by emphasizing the importance of drawing upon the sources that naturally emerge out of diverse cultures.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of an introduction and seven chapters. The introduction provides an overview of the thesis, the importance of the project and a review of the literature. Chapter 1 is an introduction to each aspect of the triple-heritage (African, African American and Christian). Chapter 2 is a historical survey of Christian education in the African American Church. Chapter 3 offers a critical analysis of the educational ministries in African American churches. Chapter 4 is an analysis of four curriculum resources designed for, and currently being used in, African American churches. Chapter 5 discusses the spirituals as embodiments of the triple-heritage by defining them, surveying their history and identifying their sources.

Chapter 6 is an analysis of the relationship between theology and Christian education, with particular attention to the theological insights drawn from the spirituals for a triple-heritage model of Christian education. Chapter 7 provides a proposed model of Christian education that illustrates how the spirituals can be used to guide the process and content of teaching the triple-heritage of African Americans.

CHAPTER 1

The Triple-Heritage

On Friday, October 15, 1993, I had the privilege of visiting a Christian school in Los Angeles on a field trip assignment for my "Contemporary Theories of Religious Education" class. Each student enrolled in the class was required to visit a religious education program that centered around a particular cultural perspective. Since my interest was in Christian education from an African American perspective, I selected a Christian school that was designed to meet the needs of African American children in the inner city.

During my brief visit, I observed the chapel service, a variety of classes and the campus. I also interviewed the principal, students and instructors by asking them several questions developed prior to the visit along with questions that emerged spontaneously. After visiting the school, I attended the noon-day revival service which was held at the church.

Several things impressed me about the school during my half-day visit. It was a fully accredited inner-city school, organized and sponsored by an African American church as part of its ministry. The school was founded twenty-three years ago with only one student and one teacher and has grown to approximately 450 students (325 families) and twenty African American teachers. The students were

quiet and attentive in chapel as well as in the classroom. On the playground they played cooperatively with other students. The students listened intently to the lectures, following the instructions for each lesson and raising their hands to respond to questions. They allowed other students to speak uninterruptedly and waited for their turn to respond. Positive praise was given to the children for good work and good behavior. The school's philosophy of education reflected the school's commitment to "the principle of Academic Excellence, in an unashamedly Christian environment."¹ The principal noted that the aim of the school was to maintain a cooperative and supportive relationship with parents, teachers and students. For instance, parents were expected to review and sign their child's homework every night. They were also encouraged to contact and meet with the principal and teachers regarding any concerns. Furthermore, students were encouraged to interact with the principal and teachers as needed.

At the same time, I was surprised to find that the classroom pictures portrayed biblical characters as white. In addition, a Eurocentric approach to the scriptures as well as to the overall classroom procedures was also being used. For example, the children were given scriptures to learn by rote, to be recited individually to the class. In contrast, African-centered pedagogy stresses group learning,

¹ Quoted from the school's information handout.

whereby requirements are mastered together. Children begin and complete a task together while supporting one another throughout the process.² Furthermore, no mention was made of the black presence in the Bible. What a disappointment! How could this be, especially in a school that is predominantly African American and claims to embrace as well as promote African American heritage?

Since this was an African American school sponsored by an African American church, with mostly African American students and teachers, I expected to see teaching methods, classroom procedures and visual aids that reflected the African American experience. This was not the case. Although the African American experience was implicit through various components of the school, (one or two of the teachers related African American contributions and role models to a particular field of study and to Christian doctrine) it was not explicitly incorporated in the overall educational process nor in the presentation of the biblical story.

Cain Hope Felder sheds light on this field experience when he highlights the influence of European cultures on biblical interpretation. He says that "throughout Western history the authority of the Bible has been predicated upon the tacit assumption of the preeminence of European

² Paul Hill, Jr., Coming of Age: African American Male Rites of Passage (Chicago: African American Images, 1992), 66.

cultures."³ Felder maintains that African American, Afro-Asiatic, Asian and Hispanic people have typically been viewed as secondary to the ancient biblical narratives and that historically the standard by which we read and interpret the Bible has been shaped by the dominant culture.⁴

Although there is clear evidence for the presence and participation of blacks in the Bible itself, many Eurocentric church officials and scholars still ignore African contributions. Consequently, these contributions have been distorted, re-interpreted and re-imaged to communicate Eurocentric characters, standards and values.⁵ Unfortunately many African Americans have embraced and incorporated these distortions in their Bible study, worship and religious practices. For example, some African American churches still display pictures that portray Jesus with long blond hair and blue eyes. Members of these congregations often become offended when asked to remove these pictures or to replace them with a black image of Jesus. They have accepted an image of Jesus that was created by the dominant culture and resist other images that may be more

³ Cain Hope Felder, "Cultural Ideology, Afrocentrism and Biblical Interpretation," in Black Theology: A Documentary History, vol. 2: 1980-1992, eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 184.

⁴ Felder, "Cultural Ideology," 184-85.

⁵ Felder, "Culture Ideology," 188-91.

representative of their own experience and culture.

Felder's insightful discussion emphasizes the impact of Western cultures on African people. He clearly illustrates how African Americans have virtually been stripped of their heritage, indoctrinated with a Eurocentric world view and led to believe that anything Eurocentric is better than anything African. Thus, the very presence and contributions of African people, not only in the Bible, but also throughout social history, have been devalued, dehumanized and denied. This reality has perpetuated self-hatred, lack of respect for one another, black-on-black violence and a systematic denial of African American personhood.

Amos Wilson further illuminates Felder's argument regarding the impact of Western cultures on African people. In Black-On-Black Violence, Wilson presents a horrifying portrait of the social and cultural dynamics that are responsible for perpetuating black-on-black violence in America. Wilson's main focus is on the psychodynamics of white supremacy and how it has become the root cause of black-on-black violence.⁶ Wilson maintains that "in the dominant White American consciousness the African male is existentially guilty," which implies that he is guilty by simply being alive. In a sense this inherent expectation

⁶ Amos N. Wilson, Black-on-Black Violence: The Psychodynamics of Black Self-Annihilation in Service of White Domination (New York: Afrikan World Infosystems, 1990), xii-xiii; 4-10.

creates a "self-fulfilling prophesy" that is played out in the African American male psyche and eventually in his actions.⁷

What is most striking about Wilson's discussion is his portrayal of the devastating reality of the system of black self-annihilation and the deep sense of hopelessness African Americans experience. Although Wilson offers some helpful recommendations for African American community preservation and empowerment,⁸ the question remains whether there is any hope. The answer can be a resounding "yes" if the church offers hope of communal, cultural and moral formation for African Americans who have been cast adrift in a violent and hopeless society.

Unfortunately, the dominance of European influences is often present in African American Christian schools and churches as well. Although the impact of Western cultures on African people has been great, African Americans must unashamedly embrace their triple-heritage as Africans, African Americans and Christians. Embracing the triple-heritage allows African Americans to reflect on the reality of God throughout their history. Through this reflection, they will become keenly aware of God's relationship with African people in bondage and God's movement towards freedom and liberation. Acknowledging the triple-heritage affirms

⁷ Wilson, 9.

⁸ Wilson, 201-05.

the reality of God not only in the past but also in the present and provides hope for the future. African Americans must also re-image, re-interpret and re-present the biblical story so that they may begin to see themselves as a strong and viable presence in the Bible. Affirming the African presence in the Bible will allow African Americans to regain a sense of confidence, self-worth and freedom.

If African American churches are to teach the triple-heritage effectively, they must have a clear understanding of the individual components of the triple-heritage as well as the triple-heritage as a whole. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to define the triple-heritage, beginning with a brief discussion of its holistic nature and then proceeding with an analysis of each element. This reflection will include a discussion of: (1) African heritage, analyzing the need to reclaim the history, culture, and geography of Africa and African peoples in the diaspora; (2) African American heritage, illuminating the experience and significant contributions of African Americans in the United States; and (3) Christian heritage, examining the distinctiveness of African American Christianity and explicating three biblical concepts that are commonly emphasized in the African American church.

The Triple-Heritage: A Holistic View

I first encountered the term triple-heritage' at the First Institutional Baptist Church of Phoenix, Arizona under the leadership of Warren H. Stewart, Sr. It had emerged as a part of the vision for the African American Christian Training School (AACTS), a bi-weekly Saturday school designed to teach Black children and youth about their heritage as Africans, Americans and Christians. The vision of AACTS is to "transform and produce generations of children and youth through a Triple-Heritage Model: thusly, [sic] producing adults that are proud of their African, American and Christian heritages" ¹⁰ The language of the triple-heritage as presented by the AACTS ministry is

' Ali AlAmin Mazrui also uses the term triple-heritage in his book entitled The Africans: A Triple-Heritage. Mazrui describes the triple-heritage as indigenous African traditions, Islamic culture, and Western civilization (p. 21). Mazrui engages in a critical analysis of Africa and how the dynamics of the triple-heritage have influenced the present condition of the motherland. Although these elements have contributed to numerous struggles in Africa, they also offer hope for her future. See Ali AlAmin Mazrui, The Africans: A Triple-Heritage (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986). At the time of this publication Mazrui was Research Professor at the University of Jos at Nigeria, and Professor of Political Science and Afro-American Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Molefi Kete Asante and Hailu Habtu critique Mazrui, charging that his analysis of Africa is largely Eurocentric. They agree that Mazrui's study would benefit from an Afrocentric orientation. See Molefi Kete Asante, Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 114-17; Hailu Habtu, "The Fallacy of the 'Triple-Heritage' Thesis: A Critique," Issue 13 (1984): 26-29.

¹⁰ First Institutional Baptist Church, AACTS Parent-Student Handbook (Phoenix: First Institutional Baptist Church, 1996), 3.

slightly different from the language used in this dissertation. For example, the AACTS ministry uses the term "American" instead of "African American." This distinction will be discussed in further detail below.

Unlike the Christian school mentioned above, which does not explicitly address the African American heritage, AACTS promotes the triple-heritage through a broad-based curriculum that features all three aspects. The following objectives are central to the AACTS ministry:

1. **African Development**--Students will develop a positive understanding of African history, geography, culture and accept Africa as the source of their ancestral heritage.
2. **American Development**--Students will gain a positive understanding of their society and themselves (mind, body and soul) and develop a sense of appreciation and responsibility to their peers, their community and their race.
3. **Christian Development**--Students will develop a positive understanding of the Biblical concept of humankind as God's family.¹¹

In short, the triple-heritage, as envisioned through the AACTS ministry, refers to the African, American and Christian heritage. According to the Reverend Jackie L. Green, the former Director of AACTS, youth must know who they are as Africans in order to appreciate the contributions that African people have made to society; youth must know who they are as Americans, in order to claim

¹¹ First Institutional Baptist Church, "AACTS 1996-97 Pre K-6th Grade Program: Introducing the 'New' Middle School Program, 7th-9th Grades," brochure, First Institutional Baptist Church, Phoenix, 1996.

ownership of this country, especially since this country was built upon the backs of African foreparents; and youth must know who they are as Christians, in order to affirm their uniqueness as children of God and to live their lives fully and completely for Christ.¹²

This dissertation broadens the AACTS definition of the African component of the triple-heritage by assuming a wider global (Pan African) perspective that includes all persons of African descent whether on the continent of Africa or in other parts of the world. It also makes a distinction between American heritage and African American heritage. Although the African American experience is a part of the American heritage, there is a danger of losing the distinctiveness of the African American experience when this aspect of the triple-heritage is identified only as American. Furthermore, the AACTS understanding of the Christian component of the triple-heritage is expanded by reflecting specifically on the Christian experience of African Americans, lifting up the uniqueness of African American Christianity.

Thus, in this discussion, the triple-heritage is defined as African, African American and Christian. These components are closely related and intimately interwoven. Each aspect of the triple-heritage is in dynamic

¹² First Institutional Baptist Church, AACTS Ministry: "To God Be the Glory" (Phoenix: New Day Video Productions, 1996), videocassette.

relationship with the others; they all draw upon one another, they flow out of each other and they build upon each other. Thus while each element of the triple-heritage contributes something valuable and distinctive, the triple-heritage must be seen as a whole, with interrelated components, rather than as three separate and distinct elements.

Components of the Triple-Heritage

Although the triple-heritage must be viewed as a whole, a clear understanding of each aspect of the triple-heritage is vital to this holistic concept of the African American Christian heritage. The following discussion of the three streams is an analysis of African heritage, African American heritage and Christian heritage respectively. Implications for Christian education in the African American church will also be included.

African Heritage

As noted above African heritage refers to the history, culture, and geography of Africa and African peoples in the diaspora. Embracing African heritage enables African Americans to value who they are as African people and compels them to stand in solidarity with all of their sisters and brothers of African descent in the struggle for freedom and liberation. Part of the problem, however, is that not only are African Americans uninformed about Africa, they often reject it as the "source of their ancestral

heritage"¹³ and deny the value of anything African.

The rejection of Africaness has been perpetuated historically through the false notion that African beliefs, values and practices are "pagan", "uncivilized" and thus "undesirable." Henry Mitchell sheds light on how these images of Africaness have affected African Americans through the years. He notes:

In time what our ancestors knew to be African and 'proper' was viewed as African and 'pagan' or 'ignorant.' After that it was seen as just 'Black' and 'undesirable' with consequent psychological damages to Black self-esteem.¹⁴

The church's task, then, is not only to inform about Africa but to help redefine what is meant by African heritage.

While the assault on African American self-esteem and self-acceptance has been waged on many fronts, only four aspects will be presented below along with ways the church can respond to them. The first assault is that African traditional practices and beliefs have been devalued.

Although the first Africans arrived in this country with a rich heritage that included a dynamic world view, diverse cultural practices and a vibrant religious tradition, the white slave owners, missionaries and other supporters of slavery failed to recognize the value of their African background. Negative connotations and characteristics were

¹³ First Institutional Baptist Church, "AACTS", brochure.

¹⁴ Henry H. Mitchell, Black Beliefs: Folk Beliefs of Blacks in America and West Africa (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 1.

assigned to African practices and beliefs, thus demeaning all aspects of African life. For instance, during the time of slavery, American society refused to acknowledge the existence of an indigenous African culture and civilization, perpetuating the myth that Africans were ignorant, uncivilized heathens who needed to be bound, broken and tamed thereby justifying the enslavement and continued exploitation of African people.

Although this image of Africans was widespread, Henry Mitchell argues that Africans were misunderstood by whites and were in fact self-sufficient and highly intelligent.¹⁵ Melville Herskovits, likewise, debunks the notion that Africans were an inferior race of people who came to the New World devoid of all culture. Through his study of African retentions, Herskovits emphasizes the historical relevance of African people in order to illustrate that Africans had a rich cultural heritage and viable civilizations prior to their contact with Europeans.¹⁶

Another way that Africans were demeaned was that traditional African religious beliefs and practices were

¹⁵ Henry Mitchell, 33.

¹⁶ Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), xxviii-xxix, 20-32. Herskovits' view of African survivals is in sharp contrast to E. Franklin Frazier and others who maintained that Africans were virtually stripped of their culture through the process of enslavement. For a discussion of Frazier's view, see E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Church in America (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 1-19; and The Negro in the United States, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957), 3-21.

considered pagan and superstitious. For example, since Africans have a great respect for all of nature including the sun, moon, stars, wind, rivers, trees, and animals, they were accused of "animism" and "nature worship," practices viewed by the missionaries as idolatrous.¹⁷ Accompanying this was the widespread notion that Africans have no concept of a Supreme Being. This belief has led to a disrespect of the African understanding of God and has perpetuated the notion that Africans worship the devil and fetishes.¹⁸ But such accusations are clearly wrong.

Mbiti, Barrett, Lovell and Raboteau agree that all African societies have a belief in God as the Supreme Being who is the creator and sustainer of all things.¹⁹ For instance, among the Yoruba, the Supreme Being is Olodumare or Olorun, who is above all other gods and is the ruler of heaven and earth. The Akan refer to the Supreme Being as Nyame or Onyame, the shining or resplendent One. The Ibo Supreme Being is Chuku Chineke, the Creator God.²⁰

¹⁷ Leonard E. Barrett, Soul Force: African Heritage in Afro-American Religion (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1974), 37-39; Raboteau, 9-10; John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969), 15-16, 48-57.

¹⁸ Raboteau, 9.

¹⁹ Barrett, Soul Force, 17; Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 29; Lovell, 30-31; Raboteau, 8.

²⁰ E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1962), 18-47, 52; Marjorie R. Bogen, "The Interaction of Art and Religion in the Culture of the Yorubas," in The Black Experience in Religion, ed. C.

According to Mbiti, the existence of God is known by all Africans "almost by instinct" as exemplified in an Ashanti proverb that states, "No one shows a child the Supreme Being."²¹ He asserts that Africans have an intimate understanding of God as Supreme Being, a deep reverence and respect for God and a confident reliance upon the power of God to control and sustain all of life.

Moreover, according to Mbiti, since humans live in a religious universe, "natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God." They are not considered God but they originate from God, bear witness to God and therefore reflect the image of God.²² He illustrates this point in his discussion of the understanding of the sun among numerous African peoples. He observes that

among many societies, the sun is considered to be a manifestation of God Himself, and the same word, or its cognate, is used for both. . . . There is no concrete indication that the sun is considered to be God, or God considered to be the sun, however closely these may be associated. At best the sun symbolizes aspects of God, such as His omniscience, His power, His everlasting endurance,

Eric Lincoln (Garden City: Doubleday, Anchor Press, 1974), 300-01; Kofi Asare Opoku, "Aspects of Akan Worship," in The Black Experience in Religion, ed. C. Eric Lincoln (Garden City: Doubleday, Anchor Press, 1974), 286, 296-97; Percy Amaury Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, 3 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 2:40-43. See also J. B. Danquah, The Akan Doctrine of God (1944; reprint, London: Class, 1968); Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

²¹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 29.

²² Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 48.

and even His nature.²³

The African understanding of God, then, betrays both subtlety and complexity, a fact that, ironically, was overlooked because of the missionaries' own prejudice and lack of sophistication.

The African understanding of community has also been rejected in favor of an individualistic society that stresses the protection of private property and individual rights as the basis for social and political organization. Traditionally, the African community has been characterized by extended families and/or subfamilies that provide social, economic and spiritual support. Africans have typically relied upon this communal support system for assistance with children and family concerns, emotional strength and encouragement, spiritual guidance and direction, consultation for legal and/or economic matters, fraternal affiliations, and communal and tribal identity.²⁴ A strong emphasis on individualism in the United States has led to the breakdown of the African American family, the social crisis within the African American community and the lack of

²³ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 52.

²⁴ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 100-09; A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, introduction to African Systems of Kinship and Marriage, eds. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Ford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 3-6, 39-43; Warfield-Coppock, Adolescent Rites of Passage, 12-14; Michelene R. Malson, Understanding Black Single Parent Families: Stresses and Strengths, Work in Progress, no. 25 (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies, 1987), 2-3.

positive transmission of familial, cultural and Christian values.²⁵ Consequently, many African American youth are turning to street values for guidance, support and direction.

Ogbonnaya suggests that balance between the individual and the community is central to an African concept of community. He maintains that

the individual is primarily connected to others psychically, spiritually, and physically, and second, a 'for-her/himself' individual. Even in one's individuality one is never truly separated from his or her fundamental communal connection.²⁶

This view of community suggests a mutual relationship that allows persons to be concerned about the well-being of others in relation to self as each person strives to maintain harmony within the community. This fundamental understanding of community has virtually disappeared in American society.

Perhaps the ultimate devaluation of African culture is that African practices have been replaced by European American norms and conventions. This was particularly evident during the time of slavery when Africans were

²⁵ Hill, Coming of Age, 40-41; Paul Hill, "Raising Male Children," The Drum: National Rites of Passage Institute 1, no. 2 (1994): 1, 4-5; Delitha L. Morrow, "Rites of Passage," Upscale, May 1993, 55-56.

²⁶ A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 10-11. See also Mbiti's discussion in African Religions and Philosophy, 106-09.

prohibited from using their native language and forced to adopt English. Africans were also stripped of their African names and given new names by their slave masters. Furthermore, they were forced to learn new work skills that would aid them in the production of cotton, sugarcane and other staple crops.²⁷ Although African slaves were surrounded by a new way of life, a new view of the world and new modes of communication, Gayraud Wilmore argues that Africans "defied total assimilation" and fought to maintain some level of their African identity.²⁸ Nevertheless, the practice of replacing African modes of life with European American norms and conventions initially employed to "season" or break Africans into the plantation regime²⁹ served to perpetuate the myth that Africaness is less than desirable.

The second assault on African American self-esteem and self-acceptance emerges from the understanding of "black" as evil, bad and dirty, and "white" as good, pure and clean. Over the years negative images of blackness have been perpetuated in everyday experiences and promoted through music, art, literature, media, education, science, history

²⁷ John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 48-49; Frazier, The Negro Church in America, 2-3.

²⁸ Gayraud Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 239-40.

²⁹ Franklin, 48-49; Frazier, Negro Church in America, 2-3.

and religious teachings. A striking illustration of how these images have been understood by society can be found in an article by the Kelly Miller Smith Institute, Inc. entitled "What Does it Mean to be Black and Christian?" In this discussion the terms "black" and "white" are presented as they have been defined in Webster's Third New International Dictionary.³⁰ Some of the definitions given under each word are presented below.

white - free from blemish, moral stain or impurity; outstandingly righteous; innocent; not marked by malignant influence; notably pleasing as auspicious; fortunate; notably ardent; decent; in a fair and uprightly manner; a sterling man.³¹

black - outrageously wicked, a villain; dishonorable; expressing or indicating disgrace, discredit or guilt; connected with the devil; expressing menace; sullen; hostile; unqualified; committing a violation of public regulation; illicit, illegal; affected by some undesirable condition.³²

In her analysis of the differences between "blackness" and "whiteness," Delores Williams notes that religion, science and politics have all advanced negative images of the color black. This negative understanding of blackness

³⁰ Kelly Miller Smith Institute Inc., "What Does it Mean to be Black and Christian?" in Black Theology: A Documentary History, vol. 2: 1980-1992, eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 167.

³¹ Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. "white." Quoted in Kelly Miller Smith Institute, Inc., 167.

³² Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. "black." Quoted in Kelly Miller Smith Institute, Inc., 167.

has contributed to the assault on African American personhood and the continued oppression of African American people.”

The rejection of African standards of beauty and the imposition of negative myths and stereotypes upon African American people constitute the third assault on African American self-esteem and self-acceptance. Since black is viewed as inherently bad, African features and characteristics have also been considered less than desirable. Just as black personhood has been considered inferior so have African standards of beauty. A childhood chant illustrates the subtle message of black inferiority.

If you're white you're alright, if you're yellow
you're mellow, if you're brown stick around, if
you're black you better get back.”³⁴

While growing up in a predominantly anglo community, I heard this chant recited by both black and white children. The message of white superiority and black inferiority has been ingrained in American consciousness resulting in negative myths, stereotypes and beliefs about African American humanity, ethnicity and sexuality.

In his book entitled Xodus: An African American Male Journey, Garth Baker-Fletcher explores the positive and

³³ Delores Williams, Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 85.

³⁴ I learned this chant as a child on the playground. Although this is the version that I learned growing up, there are numerous variations.

negative aspects of the black male mythical figures Sambo, and John Henry. Sambo has been portrayed as a black clown (whether performed by blacks or whites) whose dancing, singing, frolicking and humor were designed for white entertainment and black ridicule and exploitation.³⁵ The negative images of Sambo have persisted through the years presenting a distorted image of African American males as happy-go-lucky clowns who lack intelligence and skills to function as contributing members of society. The legend of John Henry has perpetuated a negative image of African American males possessing superhuman strength that is subjugated and exploited by American industrial progress. Baker-Fletcher makes the point that John Henry's life was ultimately sacrificed and then thrown away.³⁶ This image of African American males suggests that black male bodies are to be used as instruments of financial gain for the dominant culture in American society. Baker-Fletcher challenges African American males to move beyond these stereotypes and to reclaim their bodies for God, themselves and the African American community.³⁷

African American women have been subjected to negative stereotypes as well. Over the years, four stereotypes in

³⁵ Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, Xodus: An African American Male Journey (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 52-57.

³⁶ Garth Baker-Fletcher, 57-59.

³⁷ Garth Baker-Fletcher, 59.

particular, have been consistently portrayed through media, art, literature, music, education, legal decisions and political policies:" (1) The Mammy - traditionally portrayed as the "faithful, obedient domestic servant" who is an asexual surrogate mother devoted to the development of the white family;" (2) The Matriarch - typically characterized as one who works outside of the home and is super-strong, emasculating, domineering, aggressive, hostile, hysterical, argumentative, controlling, overbearing and intrusive; ⁴⁰ (3) The Welfare Mother - usually stereotyped as an unwed mother who is lazy and unwilling to work;⁴¹ and (4) The Jezebel - often viewed as a "sexually

³⁸ Patricia H. Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991), 70-78; Patricia Morton, Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 1-13; Cleovonne W. Turner, Clinical Applications of the Stone Center Theoretical Approach to Minority Women, Work in Progress, no. 28 (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies, 1987), 3; Julia Boyd, In the Company of My Sisters: Black Women and Self-Esteem (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 9-10, 16.

³⁹ Collins, 71. See also Barbara Christian, Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers (New York: Pergamon, 1985), 2; Delores Williams, 60-83.

⁴⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, The Negro Family: The Case for National Action (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1965), reprinted in Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancy, The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967), 70-80. See also Collins, 73-75; Morton, 3-6.

⁴¹ Collins, 76-77.

aggressive woman."⁴²

Although in today's society it may appear that these negative images no longer impact African Americans, some scholars believe that they are still affecting African Americans on some level and they can lead African Americans to a distorted sense of self, poor self-esteem and strained relationships with others.⁴³

Patricia Collins notes that European American standards of beauty along with myths and stereotypes are usually defined and applied to African Americans by white men and women, and by some African Americans.⁴⁴ The effect can be devastating. She emphasizes this point by citing Gwendolyn Brooks who writes: "When I was a child, it did not occur to me, even once, that the black in which I was encased . . . would be considered, one day, beautiful."⁴⁵ These false standards have caused some African Americans to discriminate against each other based on "skin color, hair type, facial contour, physical appearance, socio-economic status, regional background and the like"⁴⁶ thus encouraging

⁴² Collins, 78; See also Morton, 10-11; and Delores Williams, 70-71.

⁴³ Morton, 11-12; Turner, 3-5; Boyd 15-16.

⁴⁴ Collins, 80.

⁴⁵ Gwendolyn Brooks, Report from Part One: The Autobiography of Gwendolyn Brooks (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972), 37. Cited in Collins, 80.

⁴⁶ Turner, 5.

conflicts within the African American community. Moreover, they are clearly related to discrimination against blacks. Darker persons are often considered inferior and denied opportunities, while light skinned persons are given preferential treatment.⁴⁷

The fourth assault on African American self-esteem and self-acceptance is that African history has been portrayed negatively or ignored altogether in American history.

Throughout American history Africans have typically been presented as ignorant savages who had no cultural background and who were virtually uncivilized until they came into contact with European people; enslaved Africans were the lower class, uneducated outcasts of society. Barrett maintains along with Herskovits that it was precisely this view of Africans as inferior that formed the premise for the "moral code" that governed their interaction with the slaves. Racism and discrimination are the result of this myth that continues to some extent even today.⁴⁸

Although history has failed to reflect positive contributions and attributes of Africa and African people, numerous scholars in recent years have worked diligently to dispel negative myths and to portray a more accurate picture of African peoples. They have shown that the Africans brought to America came from well developed areas with

⁴⁷ Collins, 78-82.

⁴⁸ Barrett, Soul Force, 14-15; Herskovits, 1-2.

sophisticated political, economic, educational, religious and social institutions prior to their contact with Europeans."⁹

Indeed, most came from various West African regions that were highly developed and well established during the time of European contact. These regions included the Congo, the Gold Coast, Dahomey, Togo, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. A wide-range of African peoples including the Mandinke, the Yoruba, the Ibo and the Bakongo were also impacted by the slave trade.³⁰ Many of these Kingdoms had advanced economic systems based on resources such as iron, brass, ivory, quartz, granite, gold and silver. Highly advanced legal, medical and religious practices were also common in African communities. Furthermore, rich cultural expressions through music, art, dance and folklore continue to characterize these African countries even today.³¹

⁹ Barrett, Soul Force, 16; Franklin, 15-29; See also Mark Hyman, Blacks Before America (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1994); Cheikh Anta Diop, Precolonial Black Africa: A Comparative Study of the Political and Social Systems of Europe and Black Africa, from Antiquity to the Formation of Modern States trans. Harold J. Salemson (Brooklyn: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987).

³⁰ Leonard Barrett, "African Religions in the Americas," in The Black Experience in Religion, ed. C. Eric Lincoln (Garden City: Doubleday, Anchor Press, 1974), 312; Barrett, Soul Force, 16; Raboteau, 6-7; Franklin, 3-14; Sterling Stuckey, Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 10-11.

³¹ Barrett, "African Religions in the Americas," 312-13; Franklin, 15-29. See also Hyman, Blacks Before America, and Diop, Precolonial Black Africa.

Nevertheless, confronted with wide-spread attacks on Africaness, many African Americans have become disinterested in Africa and prefer not to embrace their African heritage. The church must become involved in correcting negative influences and assisting African Americans in seeing their African heritage in a positive light. Although the assault on African American self-esteem and self-acceptance has been great, significant work is currently being done to encourage African Americans to reclaim their African heritage and to appreciate the uniqueness of who they are as African people. Two important attempts are Pan Africanism and Afrocentrism.

Pan Africanism. According to Sid Lemelle, "Pan Africanism includes all people of African ancestry living in continental Africa and throughout the world."⁵² Although Pan Africanism has had a long and varied history, its primary focus has been to encourage African people to reclaim their African identity, to celebrate their African heritage and to unite in the struggle for freedom and liberation. Pan Africanism began both with a cultural orientation and a political thrust that eventually motivated Black people to strive for economic, political and human rights. Lemelle calls attention to these cultural and political dimensions of the struggle:

The initial thrust of the movement was to restore Black people's cultural identity by glorifying the

⁵² Sid Lemelle, Pan Africanism for Beginners (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1992), 11.

African past: the history of great kingdoms, wise rulers and untold wealth. Pan-Africanist [sic] praised the kingdoms of Western Sudan: Ghana, Mali and Songhai, wise rulers like Mansa Musa (1312-1337), Sonni Ali (1464-1492) and Askia Mohammad (1493-1529), and the wealth of Ancient Egypt and Mwana Matapa. Throughout the history of slavery in the Americas, Africans fought to maintain their identity and dignity. Pan-Africanism is rooted in that struggle."⁵³

William Edward Burghardt DuBois embraced both the cultural emphasis and the political aspirations of Pan Africanism as well, but he also viewed Pan Africanism from an intellectual and spiritual perspective. For instance, DuBois maintained that "Pan-Africa means intellectual understanding and co-operation among all groups of Negro descent in order to bring about at the earliest possible time the industrial and spiritual emancipation of the Negro peoples."⁵⁴ By this DuBois meant that Africans all over the world needed to engage in a "certain spiritual house-cleaning," whereby they purge themselves of negative and inaccurate preconceptions and stereotypes of one another that were perpetuated by the white race. These perceptions impeded respect, understanding and communication among people of color, hindering their efforts to work together in unity for freedom and liberation. In essence, DuBois argued that African people must seek to understand one another by

⁵³ Lemelle, 16-17.

⁵⁴ William Edward Burghardt DuBois, "Pan Africa and New Racial Philosophy," in The Seventh Son: The Thought and Writings of W. E. B. DuBois, ed. Julius Lester, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1971), 208.

going to one another and entering into dialogue about their own cares and concerns."⁵⁵

Josiah Young adds another dimension to this discussion with his emphasis on Pan African theology. According to Young, Pan African theology is a "transcontextual discourse: it focuses, simultaneously, on diverse Black people--such as the Black American underclass, the Haitian refugees, and the Zairian peasants--and commends a single, but 'nuanced,' commitment to their liberation."⁵⁶

Of particular note in Young's discussion are his emphases on solidarity and on the rich interchange among African people through language, culture, identity and religious expression in the struggle for freedom and liberation. It is through this interchange that a deeper sense of appreciation of African roots emerges. Working side-by-side with other African brothers and sisters allows African people to learn from one another and to create a sense of oneness that enables them to value their uniqueness as a people. DuBois emphasized this point as well.

Although there are various perspectives of Pan Africanism, Lemelle lists several common themes that are typically emphasized through Pan Africanism in an effort to

⁵⁵ DuBois, "Pan Africa and New Racial Philosophy," 208-09.

⁵⁶ Josiah U. Young III, "God's Path and Pan-Africa," in Black Theology: A Documentary History, vol. 2: 1980-1992, eds. James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 18.

reclaim African heritage:

- Africans and persons of African origin recognize Africa as their homeland.
- Solidarity among men and women of African descent.
- Belief in a distinct "African personality."
- Restoration of Africa's history.
- Pride in African cultural heritage.
- Africa for Africans in church and state.
- The hope for a glorious and united future Africa.⁵⁷

Teaching the triple-heritage must involve a conscious effort to embrace and appreciate a rich African heritage and a sensitivity to the struggle for liberation for all persons of African descent. Pan Africanism can facilitate the African American church in this endeavor.

Afrocentrism. Afrocentrism is another African American movement aimed at facilitating African Americans in embracing and appreciating their African heritage. Afrocentrism means to move Africa and African ideals to the central point of reflection, analysis and critique of African life. It is the lens through which African Americans view their history, culture and contributions.⁵⁸

Pan Africanism and Afrocentrism have similar qualities in that they both acknowledge the centrality of Africa, they value African culture, they celebrate the contributions of African people and they emphasize liberation for all persons

⁵⁷ Lemelle, 19.

⁵⁸ Molefi Kete Asante, The Afrocentric Idea (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 6; Molefi Kete Asante, Afrocentricity (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988), 6.

of African descent. On the other hand, they are two distinct historical movements. Pan Africanism has a much longer history dating back to 1441 when twelve Africans were taken as slaves by the Portuguese adventurer, Antam Goncalvez. Although Pan Africanism was not an organized movement at that time, the struggle for liberation and the impetus to maintain African identity and heritage had begun.⁵⁹ Pan Africanism emphasized and continues to promote a strong global focus, political orientation and active participation in the liberation of all African people.

Afrocentrism, in contrast, is a recent movement that has emerged during the late twentieth century. Although Afrocentrism also incorporates a global, political and liberative orientation, it tends to place a greater emphasis on cultural and historical concerns.

Molefi Kete Asante, of Temple University, coined the term in 1980⁶⁰ in an effort to combat negative images of Africa and the denial of African contributions to society. According to Asante, Afrocentrism centers around the beauty

⁵⁹ Lemelle, 12-14. For a broader discussion on Pan Africanism see also Tony Martin, The Pan-African Connection: From Slavery to Garvey and Beyond (Dover: The Majority Press, 1983); Josiah U. Young III, A Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992); and Ronald W. Walters, Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora: An Analysis of Modern Afrocentric Political Movements (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993).

⁶⁰ Asante, Afrocentricity, ix.

of Africa and acknowledges Africans as "subjects of historical and social experiences rather than objects in the margins of European experiences."⁶¹ He further asserts that Afrocentrism esteems African heritage, inspiring a sense of appreciation and pride.⁶² Asante's work is significant in that he displaces Europe as the central focus, placing Africa at the heart of African American consciousness.

While Asante affirms African personhood and contributions, Warfield-Coppock emphasizes geography and philosophy in her definition of Afrocentrism. For Warfield-Coppock, Afrocentrism "means to center on Africa and represents the continent of our ancestors; To place Africa at the center of your belief system or to be centered in African concepts."⁶³ Thus, Afrocentrism embraces the fullness of African culture, heritage and social contributions.

Although Afrocentrism supports global solidarity (though not as strongly as Pan Africanism) in the effort to liberate all persons of African descent from economic, political and racial oppression, it is particularly valuable for African Americans because it encourages them to reclaim

⁶¹ Molefi Kete Asante, Malcolm X as Cultural Hero and Other Afrocentric Essays (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1993), 99.

⁶² Asante, Malcolm X, 99-100.

⁶³ Warfield-Coppock, Adolescent Rites of Passage, 21.

a sense of pride in their African heritage and in the contributions that their African ancestors have made. Afrocentrism is a powerful reminder to African Americans that they are significant and they are capable of contributing to the well being of this society. Thus, Afrocentrism's assertion of significant African contributions to world civilizations, as proactive subjects rather than passive objects throughout history, is a source of motivation and inspiration for many African Americans.

Afrocentrism allows African Americans to embrace their triple-heritage by providing a metatheoretical framework that moves them through three basic stages: dislocation--having no sense of historical awareness or consciousness resulting in a devaluing of the African heritage;⁴⁴ location--identifying their orientation with regard to Afrocentricity and Eurocentricity;⁴⁵ and relocation--recovering, reclaiming and revaluing their African heritage.⁴⁶

Pan Africanism and Afrocentrism can both assist the church in focusing on African heritage by affirming, celebrating and embracing Africa as the ancestral heritage of African Americans.

⁴⁴ Asante, Malcolm X, 100-01.

⁴⁵ Asante, Malcolm X, 100-01.

⁴⁶ Asante, Malcolm X, 100, 114.

African American Heritage

African American heritage refers to the experience, culture and significant contributions of African Americans in the United States. The African American component of the triple-heritage encourages African Americans to affirm their personhood, to celebrate their historical contributions and to value all aspects of their rich heritage as African Americans. This holistic understanding of African American heritage is significant because African Americans are not just African and they are not just American but they are both African and American, and they have a developed tradition as African Americans. When African Americans embrace their full heritage they can appreciate the uniqueness of who they really are. With this in mind, the aim of the African American component is threefold: to teach African Americans about their heritage, to create an appreciation for this heritage, and to encourage a sense of responsibility to the African American community.

Many African Americans today know little about their heritage. While some are familiar with a number of celebrities and sports personalities, many of them have a limited understanding of African American history and are virtually unaware of the struggles and significant contributions made by African American people. This lack of knowledge has resulted in a lack of pride in African American heritage, and a lack of hope and direction for the

future. The church can facilitate African Americans in reclaiming a sense of pride in their African American heritage.

In describing his motivation for writing the book Black Belief, Henry Mitchell illustrates the importance of African Americans exploring their heritage. He notes that the inspiration for writing the book came after observing that many African American undergraduate students experienced "psychic healing" and "intellectual stimulation" during a History of Black Religion course which affirmed African American cultural and religious roots. According to Mitchell, these students experienced inner peace and self respect as they learned about their rich heritage.⁶⁷ As African Americans explore their rich heritage they too can experience similar restoration.

The African American component of the triple-heritage can be explored from a variety of perspectives. Two major areas, the African American legacy of survival and liberation in the United States and the celebration of African American heroes and heroines, will be considered here. Although it is widely acknowledged that African American experience is diverse and multidimensional, it is important to note that African Americans in the United States share a common experience that has included a history of slavery, racism and oppression on the one hand, and a

⁶⁷ Henry Mitchell, 1-2.

heritage of creative expression, acts of bravery and self-sacrifice on the other.

African American Legacy of Survival and Liberation. Although the African American experience in the United States has been one of racism and oppression, the church has been, and can be, instrumental in moving African Americans towards a positive view of African American heritage. What is important to the future is not only scrutinizing the harsh realities of slavery, Jim Crow practices, violence, racism and denial of human/civil rights of African Americans in this country, but also examining the creative ways that African Americans have overcome gross mistreatment and injustice in light of these realities. One way of doing this is to explore the African American legacy of survival and liberation.

Gayraud Wilmore notes that survival and liberation are two foundational strategies of the African American experience. Throughout African American history, these strategies have emerged together as a result of living in an oppressive society. He further observes that survival is the determination to maintain or "make do" and that liberation emerges out of the "will to survive." Liberation, however, goes a step further by pushing beyond survival to an active mode of "must do more" in order to attain a better quality of life.⁶⁶ The African American

⁶⁶ Wilmore, 227-28.

legacy of survival and liberation reflects this determination to survive while pursuing liberation from the oppressive conditions in this country.

The survival and liberation strategies of African Americans can be observed in two types of activities that African Americans have employed: resistance and protest. Resistance was actually more prevalent than commonly realized. Unaware of this fact, many African Americans have rejected their African American heritage because they have been led to believe that their history began in slavery, and is thus important to forget, and that the Africans who were brought to this country acquiesced to a life of bondage, and thus left a shameful heritage. The literature, however, abounds with evidence of the Africans' refusal to accept their status of slavery. In fact, it has been well documented that a spirit of resistance emerged from the beginning of the slave trade and persisted until the abolition of slavery." The slaves were quite ingenious in devising various means and mechanisms for resisting the evils of slavery.

This resistance took place on several different levels: individual, collective and religious. On an individual level many slaves resisted slavery by running away, refusing to work, procrastinating on the job, performing their work

" Barrett, "African Religions," 316; Barrett, Soul Force, 57; Herskovits, 87; Franklin, 40-41.

poorly, complaining of mysterious illnesses, refusing medication and starving themselves.⁷⁰ In extreme cases slaves were known to attempt suicide in a number of ways. For example, Herskovits tells of a man who attempted to cut his throat after being sold into slavery. When the ship's surgeon tried to sew him up he tore out the stitches with his fingernails. He eventually died of starvation.⁷¹ Another trader observed that the African captives were "so wilful and loth to leave their own country, that they have often leap'd out of the canoes, boat and ship, into the sea, and kept under water till they were drowned."⁷² Barrett notes that many slaves committed suicide by ingesting poisons made from various herbs or arsenic. Many also committed infanticide in order to spare their children a life of bondage.⁷³

Africans were determined to resist the bondage of an inhumane system of slavery and they took advantage of every opportunity to fight for their freedom. One writer's first hand experience with the slave trade emphasizes this point.

As very few of the negroes can so far brook the

⁷⁰ Herskovits, 87-88; Barrett, "African Religions," 316; Dwight N. Hopkins, "Slave Theology in the 'Invisible Institution,'" in Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue: Black Theology in the Slave Narratives, eds. Dwight N. Hopkins and George Cummings (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 32-33.

⁷¹ Herskovits, 87-88.

⁷² Quoted in Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, 40-41.

⁷³ Barrett, "African Religions," 316.

loss of their liberty, and the hardships they endure, as to bear them with any degree of patience, they are ever upon the watch to take advantage of the least negligence in their oppressors. . . . They are likewise always ready to seize every opportunity for committing some act of desperation to free themselves from their miserable state; and notwithstanding the restraints under which they are laid, they often succeed.⁷⁴

On a collective level, the slaves resisted slavery by joining together to assist in the escape of hundreds of slaves. As previously noted, one of the most successful of such efforts was the underground railroad led by Harriet Tubman. There were also numerous slave insurrections and revolts. The three best known in the United States were those led by Gabriel Prosser (1800), Denmark Vesey (1822), and Nat Turner (1831).⁷⁵ Furthermore, slaves cooperated in what Dwight Hopkins refers to as a "culture of resistance" which provided them with an ethic of survival, based on three basic practices: a taking-not-stealing practice, whereby slaves took from their masters what they believed the masters had wrongfully taken from them e.g. meat and other food items; a duality of survival, in which slaves consciously expressed themselves in one manner in the presence of their masters and expressed themselves more authentically in the presence of other slaves; and a discourse of solidarity, which compelled slaves to stand

⁷⁴ A. Falconbridge, An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa, (London, 1788), 30, quoted in Herskovits, 88.

⁷⁵ Wilmore, 53-73.

together in the struggle by not betraying each other's confidence."⁶ As a former slave remarked "you see we never tole on each other."⁷

Religious resistance according to Henry Mitchell consisted of rebellion against the hypocritical teachings of white religion regarding stealing, laziness or disclosure of another slaves' whereabouts or activities. This form of resistance required a great deal of time and energy from the white preachers who tried to no avail to convince the slaves of their misdeeds.⁸ Mitchell notes, however, that the most direct form of religious resistance was exemplified in the slave preachers' determination to continue preaching a message of hope and freedom, even though many were beaten, tortured and killed.⁹

The African slaves were convinced that slavery was not ordained by God and that they were created for freedom, not bondage. This message of their God-given personhood allowed the slaves to assert their human dignity through various modes of survival that constantly inspired them to strive for liberation from an inhumane system of oppression.

Another strategy that African Americans have employed to overcome racism and oppression is active engagement in

⁶ Hopkins, 36-43.

⁷ Mrs. Jennie Patterson, quoted in Hopkins, 42.

⁸ Henry Mitchell, 118-19.

⁹ Henry Mitchell, 120.

protest for freedom and liberation. A contemporary example of African American protest in the United States is the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. This movement was a massive nonviolent effort to fight for equality, civil rights and human dignity in America. For years African Americans had lived under a racist system that continuously denied their equality through laws such as the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, the Dred Scott decision (1857), and the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of the Supreme Court (1896).⁸⁰ African Americans were also terrorized by violence designed to maintain white dominance through segregation and denial of voting privileges. This violence escalated, according to James M. Washington, after the Brown v. Topeka, Kansas Board of Education decision of 1954, which mandated public school desegregation.⁸¹ White racist organizations such as the White Citizen's Council and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) "intensified violence towards blacks."⁸²

It was in the midst of this volatile climate, on December 1, 1955, that Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

⁸⁰ James H. Evans, Jr., We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 4.

⁸¹ James M. Washington, ed., A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1986), xvii.

⁸² Washington, xvii; Robert Jakoubek, Martin Luther King, Jr.: Civil Rights Leader (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), 41-42.

Her arrest and conviction for failing to comply with the city's segregation laws sparked outrage in the African American community. Soon afterwards, the Montgomery bus boycott was organized as a protest against an unjust system of segregation. The boycott was successful. On November 13, 1956 the Supreme court ruled against segregation on public transportation.³³ The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was born.

The key figure in the Civil Rights Movement was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a native of Atlanta, Georgia, the son of a Baptist minister and a graduate of three prestigious schools: Morehouse College in Atlanta; Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania (at the time); and Boston University where he received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1955.³⁴

Dr. King's numerous gifts were used effectively in the fight for freedom and liberation. For example, Dr. King was a great orator, who could inspire and motivate people for action. He was a visionary leader, who was skillful in painting a detailed picture of the task at hand along with the ultimate goal to be achieved. He was an organizer and administrator who was able to coordinate massive marches and rallies that lifted up the demands of the people. As a persuasive preacher, teacher and scholar he was able to

³³ Washington, xvi-xvii; Jakoubek, 44-55.

³⁴ Washington, xvi; Jakoubek, 21, 31-39, 43.

mobilize not only masses of people but vital resources in order to bring about justice and social change.

While Dr. King worked to secure justice and liberation for African Americans in the United States, his struggle for freedom also had a global focus. Dr. King's passion for human rights and dignity was exemplified in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, awarded on December 10, 1964. In this speech Dr. King maintains

I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. . . . I still believe that one day mankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive good will will proclaim the rule of the land. . . . I still believe that we shall overcome.⁵⁵

Although Dr. King was cut down by an assassin's bullet on April 4, 1968, his life and message continue to inspire African Americans to fight for justice and liberation, not only for themselves but for all people suffering under the bonds of oppression.

While the Civil Rights movement was not without its flaws and critics, particularly from proponents of the Black Power movement, which emerged as a result of its failures and limitations, the Civil Rights movement remains an important symbol of the African American tradition of

⁵⁵ Martin Luther King, "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech," in A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1986), 226.

protest and struggle.

Celebration of African American Heroes and Heroines. Traditionally, American history has primarily lifted up white heroes and heroines such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt and Susan B. Anthony while African American heroes and heroines have been virtually ignored. Consequently, many African Americans are generally unaware of the noteworthy contributions made by remarkable African Americans. Although scholarship in this area is increasing, numerous stories of African American role models remain, for the most part, untold. The African American component of the triple-heritage can assist African Americans in celebrating their stories.

Heroes/heroine figures have traditionally played a significant role in the African American community. According to Levine, many of these figures, whether fictional or real, have been passed on for generations through the art of storytelling. Although many of these figures have been transformed and recreated over the years, they have still served as a source of inspiration, motivation, education and entertainment for many African Americans.⁶⁶ Three types of heroes/heroines were common.

Fictional heroes/heroines appear frequently in African American folktales and children's literature. These figures

⁶⁶ Levine, 368.

are often animal characters or tricksters who are skilled at outwitting the dominant system of authority, unusual predicaments or other fictional characters. Arna Bontemps affirms that storytelling was an integral part of African culture transported to the New World by the slaves, and that the use of animal characters was a common African practice.⁸⁷ In describing the transformation of these characters from African to African American tales Bontemps explains:

In the African prototypes of the American Negro tales the heroes were generally the jackal, the hare, the tortoise, and the spider. The African jackal survived as the American fox, the African hare as the American rabbit, and the African tortoise as the American dry-land turtle or terrapin. The spider came only as near as the West Indies, where it reappeared in the Anansi tales of Jamaica. As a villain the African hyena was replaced by the American wolf, but that role is sometimes assigned to the fox or the bear in the American tale. The rest of the cast of characters, the lions, leopards, tigers, and monkeys was safely transported.⁸⁸

One of the most popular animal heroes in African American folktales is Brer Rabbit. Although the rabbit is often perceived as a "frightened" and "helpless" animal, the slaves portrayed Brer Rabbit as a cunning character who was a "practical joker, a braggart, a wit, a glutton, a lady's

⁸⁷ Arna Bontemps, introduction to The Book of Negro Folklore, eds. Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1958), viii.

⁸⁸ Bontemps, viii.

man, and a trickster."⁸⁹ Levine notes that the trickster characteristic of Brer Rabbit emerged initially during the time of slavery and continued for years, in various forms, as African Americans endured various forms of oppression and injustice.⁹⁰ Brer Rabbit was a symbol of good transcending evil or weakness overcoming strength through creative and cunning actions. He was not only celebrated for his unusual feats, but also for the important lessons regarding survival, caution and wise counsel that emerged from his adventures.

Another fictional hero in African American folklore is High John de Conqueror. Like many African American fictional folktale heroes he was gifted with extraordinary powers that allowed him to perform superhuman feats, including being transformed into other creatures, in order to escape peril, often at the hands of the slave master.⁹¹ Like Brer Rabbit, John was celebrated not only for his creativity in overcoming harrowing predicaments but also for his ability to survive in the midst of danger. The introductory comments of one folktale featuring John illustrates a great respect for his ability to survive.

Way back during slavery time, there was a man named John. High John the Conqueror, they called him. And he was what you call a man. Now some

⁸⁹ Bontemps, ix.

⁹⁰ Levine, 370-72.

⁹¹ Levine, 403-04.

folks say he was a big man, but the way I heard it, he wasn't no bigger than average height and didn't look no different than the average man. Didn't make any difference, though. He was what you call a be man--be here when the hard times come, and be here when the hard times are gone. No matter how much the white folks put on him, John always survived."²

African American fictional heroes provided a vehicle for African Americans to confront the dominant culture. These heroes enabled them to express not only their frustrations, hostilities and aspirations, but they also allowed them to transcend their oppressive situations.

Another type of African American hero/heroine is the slave hero. While some slave heroes were fictional, many were real people such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglas, who actually lived through slavery. Stories of these heroes/heroines survived for years after the emancipation. Levine notes that although the history of slavery was painful and embarrassing to many African Americans, these stories were shared "not with defensiveness and shame but eagerly and often with pride."³ These stories were significant for several reasons. Besides evoking deep emotion and containing important information about slavery, they also offered insights into a unique slave culture of survival and resistance, providing positive portrayals of slave heroes and their creative opposition to

² Julius Lester, Black Folktales (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 61.

³ Levine, 386-87.

slavery.”²⁴

The stories of slave heroes/heroines can be a source of inspiration and pride for African Americans, particularly since many of these stories portray a positive and realistic view of enslaved African and African American ancestors. Although many of the slave stories portray a positive view of African American slaves, Levine notes that many stories also provided a balanced view of slave character, including images of slaves such as "the craven, the sycophants, the foolish, the ruthless who preyed upon their own group."²⁵ But this concern for accuracy can only serve to reinforce the exploits of the slave heroes/heroines whose inspiring stories encourage respect, dignity, sacrifice, boldness, and pride in African American heritage.

The third type of African American heroes/heroines is contemporary real life heroes/heroines. This group includes African Americans who have overcome tremendous odds, fought for their rights and the rights of others, and made significant contributions to society as a whole. Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, Wilma Randolph and Jackie Robinson are examples of African American sports heroes who overcame racial barriers and excelled in their respective sports (boxing, track and field and baseball), despite negative myths and stereotypes about African Americans and a Jim Crow system of

²⁴ Levine, 388-89.

²⁵ Levine, 396.

injustice and segregation. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King, Jr., are examples of heroes/heroines who have fought for the rights of African Americans as well as the rights of all who are oppressed. Beyond sports and the civil rights movement, which tend to be areas where African American heroes/heroines are most often recognized, African Americans have also made significant contributions in a variety of arenas including education, medicine, politics, law, literature, entertainment, art, religion and science. Some of these heroes/heroines include: Maria Stewart and W. E. B. DuBois (education), Charles Drew (medicine), Shirley Chisholm and Adam Clayton Powell Sr. and Jr., (politics), Thurgood Marshall (law), Maya Angelou and Nikki Giovanni (literature), Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis (fine arts), Alvin Ailey and Pearl Primus (dance), Jarena Lee and Richard Allen (religion) and Zora Neal Hurston (anthropology).

Although some of the names are well known in the African American community, many others are not. The African American component of the triple-heritage can assist African Americans in exploring the unique contributions that African Americans (in public or private life) have made throughout society.

Although some efforts have been made to celebrate African American heritage through Black History Month, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday, and Kwanzaa, these events

only call African Americans to reflect upon their heritage periodically throughout the year. One month, one week or one day is not sufficient for a triple-heritage model of Christian education. The African American component of the triple-heritage can assist African Americans in building a positive sense of self-worth by reflecting upon their heritage year-round and celebrating the positive contributions of African American people.

Christian Heritage

The Christian heritage embodies the whole of Christian experience which includes the scriptures, the traditional hymns, the creeds of the church, the prayers of the people, the ritual practices and all aspects of the Christian tradition. The Christian component of the triple-heritage inspires African Americans to celebrate both the fullness of their Christian faith and the distinctiveness of their African American Christian heritage. By celebrating this unique heritage, African American Christians have the freedom to embrace their Christian faith without denying their African and African American roots. Thus, the AACTS objective of the Christian component of the triple-heritage is expanded to include not only "a positive understanding of the biblical concept of humankind as God's family," but also an acknowledgement of the particular experiences of African Americans in the United States that have shaped a distinctive African American Christianity. This distinctive

African American Christian heritage, according to Dr. J. Alfred Smith, a noted scholar and gifted homiletician in the African American church, was "forged in the context of suffering and oppression."⁶

As previously observed in the field study of the Christian school in Los Angeles, European American themes dominate many African American Christian schools and churches, while African and African American themes are often ignored. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence M. Mamiya agree with Felder regarding the impact of European influences on African American people.⁷ They further concur that while European American religious beliefs and practices are highly esteemed in American culture, African American religious experiences are often devalued, distorted or denied. This widespread assumption of the preeminence of white mainline Christianity and the rejection of African American Christianity is reflected not only in the academy and the broader society but also in the church.⁸

Since the unique religious experience of African Americans is often perceived as irrelevant and insignificant, the church can be instrumental in assisting

⁶ J. Alfred Smith, Men's Day Sermon preached at Friendship Baptist Church, Yorba Linda, Calif., 27 April 1997.

⁷ See pages 33-35 of this chapter.

⁸ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, The Black Church in the African American Experience (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), xi.

African Americans in affirming their distinctive Christian heritage as a viable expression of their Christian faith. This can be done in at least two ways: first, by putting in a positive light various aspects of African American religious experiences that have shaped a distinctive African American Christian heritage; and second, by reclaiming Christian themes commonly emphasized in the African American church that have played a significant role in promoting the well being of African Americans and their communities.

Distinctive Elements of African American Christian Heritage. Four distinctive elements of the African American church will be considered, slave religion, theology, worship, and the role of the church. These elements have been selected because they embody some of the nuances of African American Christian faith and they are still prominent in the African American church today.

One of the most distinctive features of African American Christianity is the history of enslavement. While many would prefer to ignore this aspect, numerous scholars agree that African American Christian heritage can only be fully understood when examined in the context of slavery.” For example, it has been well documented that the experience

” See Lincoln and Mamiya, The Black Church in the African American Experience; Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness, Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom; Stuckey, Slave Culture; Raboteau, Slave Religion; Henry Mitchell, Black Belief; James Evans, We Have Been Believers; Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism.

of slavery, along with the blending of West African religions and Christianity produced a distinctive Christian faith among the slaves that enabled them to survive under the brutal system of chattel slavery, which denied their humanity and devalued their African heritage.¹⁰⁰ This faith, born out of suffering, emphasized freedom, dignity, human worth, resistance to bondage and the ultimate justice of God. By beginning with an examination of the unique Christian faith or "slave religion" created by the slaves, African Americans can gain insight into the culture of the slaves and the creative strategies that they employed not only to survive, but to resist their condition of bondage.

Three aspects of slave religion inform our discussion on the distinctiveness of African American Christian heritage. One aspect is that slaves valued their secret religious meetings as a place of refuge, as social gatherings and as a means of freedom of expression. These secret meetings, commonly referred to as the "invisible institution"¹⁰¹ allowed the slaves to gather together and to worship God in their own way, free from the watchful eye and dictates of the white slave owners. Although these

¹⁰⁰ Costen, 36-37; Frazier, The Negro Church in America, 10-11; Eugene D. Genovese, Roll Jordan Roll: The World The Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 162; Levine, 59-60; Henry Mitchell, 9-11; Raboteau, 4-5; Wilmore, 3-4, 7, 26.

¹⁰¹ Costen, 36; Frazier, The Negro Church in America, 16-17; Hopkins, x; Henry Mitchell, 15-16; Raboteau, 212; Wilmore, 4-5, 14.

meetings were often illegal and resulted in severe punishment or death, the slaves continued to find solace in their sacred time together.

Slaves also had a unique interpretation of God, Jesus and human worth. Although they were in bondage, the slaves saw themselves as "Children of God." Identifying closely with the Children of Israel and the Exodus story, the slaves embraced a vision of God as a Deliverer of the oppressed. Jesus was viewed not only as a Suffering Servant and Friend, who understood what it meant to be oppressed, but also as a Conquering King who, through the power of his resurrection, could overcome even the most oppressive structures. The slaves believed that they were valued in the eyes of God and that one day they too would be delivered from their bondage.¹⁰² Levine, Cone and Hopkins observe that it was this understanding that sparked a sense of self-worth among the slaves and inspired their resistance to bondage and efforts towards freedom.

The slaves, moreover, enjoyed spontaneous, high-spirited worship services, which consisted of singing, dancing, preaching, praying, shouting and fellowship. Although these elements of worship were common in the slave community, Costen notes that other elements such as "calls to worship, community concerns, conversion, testimonies, and

¹⁰² See chapter 6 for a broader discussion of these and other theological themes embodied in the spirituals.

confessions of sins" were also important.¹⁰³ The slave community also relied upon the oral tradition of singing to gather the worshiping community or to communicate among themselves, storytelling as a form of preaching and teaching, and proverbs as a mode of sharing their wisdom and their faith.¹⁰⁴

Slave religion is a distinctive aspect of African American Christianity. Although some of the religious practices common in the invisible institution have been lost over time, many of these features are still present in African American Christianity today.

Another distinctive feature of African American Christian heritage is the African American theology of God, Jesus, humanity and freedom. Lincoln and Mamiya maintain that the impact of racism and oppression have significantly influenced African American interpretations of these elements.¹⁰⁵ They go on to suggest that while African Americans embrace the same orthodox beliefs as white Christians, their experience of racism and oppression shapes the particular focus and emphasis placed upon these theological themes. For instance, a common view of God in the African American church is that of an avenger, conqueror

¹⁰³ Costen, 40.

¹⁰⁴ Costen, 39-48; Ella Mitchell, "Oral Tradition: Legacy of Faith for the Black Church," Religious Education 81, no. 1 (winter 1986): 99-105; Hale, 201-05.

¹⁰⁵ Lincoln and Mamiya, 3.

and deliverer as vividly portrayed in the Old Testament.¹⁰⁶ Lincoln and Mamiya observe that African Americans embrace a concrete notion of Jesus rather than an abstract impersonal Christ. As such, the suffering, humiliation, death and resurrection of Jesus are commonly emphasized in light of the African American experience of racism and oppression. African Americans identify with Jesus through his human experience of suffering and death, and find hope of liberation through his victorious resurrection.¹⁰⁷

Racism and oppression have also affected African American interpretations of humanity and freedom. Since the first African slaves arrived in the New World, African Americans have struggled to affirm their self-worth and humanity. Although the systems of slavery, racism and oppression have refused to affirm them as fully human, African Americans have embraced a vision of their human acceptance and value in the eyes of God. African American scholars generally agree that African Americans have long emphasized this vision of humanity through the affirmation that they are indeed "Children of God," created in freedom, and a valued part of the human family.¹⁰⁸

Over the years the African American church has affirmed

¹⁰⁶ Lincoln and Mamiya, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Lincoln and Mamiya, 4.

¹⁰⁸ James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation 20th Anniversary ed. (1970: reprint, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 87-88; Hopkins, 29-32; Levine, 33-34; Lincoln and Mamiya, 4.

the biblical understanding of human freedom and has inspired African Americans to strive for freedom in every aspect of their lives. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, the emphasis and subsequent meaning of freedom has shifted over the years depending on the time and context in African American history.¹⁰⁹ For example, slavery brought about an emphasis on freedom from bondage. After the emancipation, the emphasis shifted to freedom of education, employment and full participation in society. During the twentieth century, the emphasis on freedom has included the struggle for social, political and economic justice.¹¹⁰

Worship is the third distinctive feature of African American Christian heritage. African American worship is a celebration of God's presence and active involvement among the people of God through the incarnate Christ and power of the Holy Spirit.¹¹¹ Although worship (corporate and personal) is an important part of all Christian congregations, African American churches embody a distinctive "tone" and "texture," which emerge out of the historical context and particular experience of African

¹⁰⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, 4.

¹¹⁰ Lincoln and Mamiya, 4.

¹¹¹ Costen, 91; Crockett, Teaching Scripture, 30; J. Wendell Mapson Jr., The Ministry of Music in the Black Church (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1984), 21, 43-44.

Americans.¹¹²

In their discussions of worship in the African American context, J. Wendell Mapson, Jr. and Crockett point out the cultural concerns of African American worship, which include a reflection upon God's movement among African American people in relationship to their historical, social, political and theological needs.¹¹³ While affirming the cultural distinctions of African American worship, Costen focuses upon three elements, music, preaching and praying, which she identifies as "uniquely African American."¹¹⁴ According to Costen, music in the African American church is central to the spiritual expression of African Americans, allowing them to share their deepest cares and concerns, born out of their particular experience of oppression. Encompassing many forms, including African American spirituals, gospel music and meter hymns, music in the African American church is often emotional, spontaneous, celebrative, and expressive.¹¹⁵

Preaching in African American worship is often characterized as dialogical whereby the preacher and congregation engage in a verbal interchange or "call and

¹¹² Mapson, 43-44; Costen, 91, 93; Crockett, Teaching Scripture, 28-30.

¹¹³ Mapson, 21, 43-44; Crockett, Teaching Scripture, 28-30.

¹¹⁴ Costen, 93.

¹¹⁵ Costen, 93.

response." Another common characteristic of African American preaching is "storytelling." The aim of the preaching moment, according to Costen, is to inspire a deeper faith and spirituality among the worshiping community.¹¹⁶

Prayer in African American worship is distinctive in that it allows African Americans to express their faith in God, affirm their personhood as "Children of God," and embrace a sense of hope and healing in the midst of oppression. Costen notes several characteristics of such prayer. First, it incorporates metaphoric prayer language, shaped by the common suffering of African Americans, and passed on through the oral tradition. Second, it is spontaneous and free flowing, indicating, for many African Americans, a sense of spirituality and empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Third, prayer is often expressed melodically or rhythmically. This form of praying (and sometimes preaching) is often referred to as "tuning." Fourth, prayer is communal, lifting up the cares and concerns of the worshiping community. Fifth, prayer is often accompanied by praise, which helps to prepare the congregation for worship and ushers in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Finally, prayer in the African American church embodies an element of "holy boldness," (approaching God confidently) which

¹¹⁶ Costen, 105.

reflects the unwavering faith of the worshiping community.¹¹⁷

Although DuBois also identifies the preacher and the music as distinctive aspects of African American worship, he concentrated on the wide range of responses to the movement of the Holy Spirit, from

the silent rapt countenance or the low murmur and moan to the mad abandon of physical fervor,--the stamping, shrieking, and shouting, the rushing to and fro and the wild waving of arms, the weeping and laughing, the vision and the trance.¹¹⁸

The most important of these responses, still common in many African American churches, he referred to as the "frenzy." The frenzy was the high spirited response or "shouting" of some worshipers when they "got the Spirit" and were filled with an overwhelming joy.¹¹⁹ Although shouting is not characteristic of all African American churches, the movement of the Holy Spirit is a vital part of the African American worship experience. Both Costen and DuBois affirm that the distinctive elements of worship in the African American church, mentioned above, are rooted in Africa and shaped by the religious experience of the slave community.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Costen, 106-09.

¹¹⁸ William Edward Burghardt DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903; reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 135.

¹¹⁹ DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, 133-35.

¹²⁰ Costen, 106; DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, 134- 35.

The last distinctive feature of African American Christian heritage is the central role of the church. From its inception, the African American church has played a significant role in the uplift of African American people. Since African Americans were denied full participation in the larger society, the church became the center of the African American community, giving rise to numerous businesses, organizations and institutions.¹²¹ The African American church was also the focal point of political, social and cultural activity promoting a sense of hope and inspiration, which compelled African Americans to strive for freedom and liberation. Reflecting upon this historical legacy, unique to the African American church, Olivia Pearl Stokes, a gifted scholar, educator and the first African American woman to receive a doctorate in religious education, observes:

Historically, beginning with slavery and continuing into the 1980's, the black church has been the most powerful force of the black people's struggle for justice, equality, liberation and freedom. The black church has been the communities' protest center, the spiritual powerhouse, and the fellowship community center for radical unity, talent launching, and fund raising for survival causes.¹²²

Through the church, which served both a spiritual and social

¹²¹ DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, 136-37; Lincoln and Mamiya, 7-8; Mapson, 19.

¹²² Olivia Pearl Stokes, "Black Theology: A Challenge to Religious Education," in Religious Education and Theology, ed. Norma H. Thompson (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1982), 84-85.

function, African Americans were able to participate fully in the African American community.

The African American church has also been a sanctuary for healing and wholeness. Writing about the therapeutic power of African American worship, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes maintains that the religious experience of worship has been a deterrent to some psychiatric conditions and that the African American church has been a center for healing and wholeness for many African Americans.¹²³ Moving beyond the worship experience to the function of the church, Marsha Foster Boyd notes that the African American church has been a source of self-help, an encourager of communal life and a motivating force for social action and change.¹²⁴ Foster Boyd describes the African American church as a "healing community," which strives for liberation and enables African Americans to function in a hostile world.¹²⁵

Adding still another view of the African American church, Christine Wiley refers to the church as a "caring community." While she affirms the healing character of the

¹²³ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "The Black Church as a Therapeutic Community: Suggested Areas for Research Into the Black Religious Experience," Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center 7, no. 1 (fall 1980): 31-32.

¹²⁴ Marsh Foster Boyd, "The African American Church as a Healing Community: Theological and Psychological Dimensions of Pastoral Care," Journal of Theology 95 (1991): 15, 22.

¹²⁵ Marsha Foster Boyd, "African American Church," 15, 22.

African American church as Boyd and Gilkes, she focuses more on the important role of faith and action. Wiley maintains that the African American church has always had a strong faith, viewing Jesus as both the Divine Caregiver, who tends to the needs of the people as well as the Divine Liberator, who empowers people to bring about change. According to Wiley, the African American church cares for the individual and communal needs of the entire congregation.¹²⁶ Thus, the African American church has been, and still is, the place where suffering people come to release their emotions and renew their "hopes, faith and courage."¹²⁷ This unique experience has inspired African Americans to continue in the struggle for liberation.

Finally, the African American church has played a vital role in the education of African Americans. Stokes observes the early efforts of the church to educate a race of people who had been systematically denied their right to freedom and education.

The Sunday school was a necessary appendage of the church because the public school did not admit Black children in those pre-emancipation days before the Civil War. In the black church, the church school was the center of literacy training for children, youth, and adults. In the church school in those early days, the textbooks were the speller and the reader (public school instruments

¹²⁶ Christine Y. Wiley, "A Ministry of Empowerment: A Holistic Model for Pastoral Counseling in the African American Community," Journal of Pastoral Care 45, no. 4 (winter 1991): 356-58.

¹²⁷ Stokes, "Black Theology," 85.

for general education) for small children and the Bible for the older Blacks.¹²⁸

Following the emancipation, the church continued to provide education for African American people. From these efforts emerged numerous African American colleges such as Morehouse and Spelman, which initially provided training for ministers, missionaries and teachers.¹²⁹ After becoming secularized in the twentieth century, the curriculum of these colleges was broadened to include a wide variety of disciplines.¹³⁰ The educational efforts of the African American church have not only empowered African Americans to overcome adverse oppression but have also inspired them to deepen their relationship with God and to strive for unity with all of humanity.

African Americans' experience of Christianity is thus distinctive in that it has been shaped by various aspects of slave religion, African American theological interpretations, indigenous worship styles and the unique role of the African American church.

Reclaiming Christian Themes in the African American Church. In addition to these distinctive religious experiences, African Americans may also be understood in

¹²⁸ Olivia Pearl Stokes, The Educational Role of Black Churches in the 70s and 80s (Philadelphia: United Church Press, Joint Educational Development, 1973), 4. This is one of three monographs in the packet "New Roads to Faith."

¹²⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, 10.

¹³⁰ Lincoln and Mamiya, 10.

terms of the themes commonly advanced in the African American church. Three in particular, faith, love and service will be examined. These themes were selected because they appear throughout the life of the African American church in the preached Word, the teaching of the biblical text, the congregational and choral singing and the prayers of the people.¹³¹ Furthermore, these themes have played a significant role in the psychological, social and spiritual survival of African American people. Over the years, a strong faith in God, love for self and others, pride in the African American heritage and a sense of responsibility to the community have allowed African Americans to overcome the effects of racism and oppression and to transform their communities.

Historically the African American church has played a significant role in shaping the faith of African American people. In recent years, however, the church's influence on contemporary African Americans has sharply declined.¹³² In light of this alarming trend, the task of the African American church is to inspire a renewed sense of faith in

¹³¹ For example, African American spirituals that embody these themes include: "Lord, I Want to be a Christian," "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me," "Mah God is So High," "We Shall Overcome," "You Hear the Lambs a-Cryin'," "God is a God," and "I'm a-Rolling." See Songs of Zion, 76, 95, 105, 127, 128, 140, 150.

¹³² James Harris, "Christian Education," 14-15; James H. Harris, Pastoral Theology: A Black-Church Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 3-5.

God among African Americans that is relevant, liberative and transformative.

A renewed sense of faith in God is vital to the African American church because God is still embraced in this community as a God of love, justice, survival and liberation.¹³³ Reclaiming the Christian heritage of African Americans involves acknowledging that God is still on the side of the oppressed and working in and through humanity to bring about healing, restoration, freedom and a renewed sense of hope and harmony within the African American community.¹³⁴ God must be lifted up not only as the Divine Liberator, but also as the One who comforts, sustains and gives African Americans the ability to fight for their own liberation. This means that faith in God is not a passive faith that waits for God to work things out, but it is an active faith that allows African Americans to make the necessary changes in their lives and in their communities.¹³⁵

A renewed faith in God also involves knowing God personally, through Jesus Christ. Costen notes that a unique characteristic of African people is their belief that personal knowledge of God is paramount to knowing about God

¹³³ Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 55-56, 58, 74; Delores Williams, 4-5.

¹³⁴ Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 61.

¹³⁵ Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 64; James Harris, Pastoral Theology, 3-5.

through doctrinal declarations, which characterize many Western-oriented Christians. Knowing God personally means experiencing the fullness of God through creation as well as through "God's revelational activity in one's own life and in the life of the community."¹³⁶

Furthermore, a renewed faith in God acknowledges the liberating activity of Jesus Christ. This liberation is a holistic liberation that encompasses all aspects of human existence including personal, spiritual, social, political and economical concerns. According to James H. Harris, African Americans believe that the liberating message of Jesus Christ "is one that is addressed to the despised and oppressed. He comforts and strengthens the weak, feeds the hungry, and heals the sick of their diseases--those who are on the 'underside of culture.'"¹³⁷ Harris further notes that the message of Christ is a message of hope for African Americans because it speaks directly to the current situation of those who are oppressed and suffering. For African Americans, Jesus is acknowledged as a "friend and advocate of the poor and oppressed." Jesus is indeed the liberator who can bring about individual as well as communal transformation.¹³⁸

African American churches that emphasize a renewed

¹³⁶ Costen, 20.

¹³⁷ James Harris, Pastoral Theology, 24.

¹³⁸ James Harris, Pastoral Theology, 26.

faith in God can provide a nurturing environment that will allow African Americans to encounter God in their own way; to deepen their relationship with God and others; and to discover the liberating activity of God through Jesus Christ in their own personal lives and in their communities.

The second Christian theme to be reclaimed is reaffirming love. In Pastoral Theology, Harris asserts that the African American church has traditionally been concerned with instilling a positive sense of self-worth in African American people by teaching them that they are children of God, despite dehumanizing laws and customs.¹³⁹ Today, developing a positive self-esteem is still a crucial part of the ministry of the African American church. Building a positive self-esteem is essential, according to Harris, if the church and community is to make a "real difference in changing the conditions of our society."¹⁴⁰

The Christian component of the triple-heritage can assist African Americans in developing a greater sense of self-esteem and self-worth, by reaffirming love for self and others as human beings created in the image of God. In Gen. 1:27, the creation story affirms the uniqueness of every person and asserts the creation of each person in the image and likeness of God. In this respect love goes beyond a sentimental feeling and involves a genuine respect,

¹³⁹ James Harris, Pastoral Theology, 115.

¹⁴⁰ James Harris, Pastoral Theology, 129.

appreciation and affirmation of every person as valuable and loveable. When African Americans love themselves as children of God, they will be able to love others and to work together for the good of all of humanity.

Cornel West builds upon this notion of love in his discussion of a love ethic, which is a significant aspect of his "politics of conversion." According to West, "self-love and love of others are both modes towards increasing self-valuation and encouraging political resistance in one's community."¹⁴¹ He goes on to illustrate how this love ethic plays out, in a practical fashion, on a local, state and national level on behalf of those who are striving to build a sense of agency among themselves in order to rise above the confines of this society.¹⁴²

By reaffirming love for self and others, African Americans can be empowered to be actively involved in their communities so that they can participate in the ongoing effort to bring about significant changes for the benefit of all. The church can facilitate African Americans in this endeavor by helping them to see themselves as change agents.

The third Christian theme to be reclaimed is returning service. In her book, African American Worship, Costen notes that "one of the strongest forces in traditional

¹⁴¹ Cornel West, Race Matters (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 19.

¹⁴² West, 19-20.

African life that continues among African Americans is a deep sense of kinship or relatedness."¹⁴³ This relatedness encompasses all of creation, which is perceived as sacred and good in God's eyes. Since the created order includes humanity, "human beings are to exist in unity with one another and with all of creation." This sense of oneness demonstrates a sense of community where all of creation works together to sustain life.¹⁴⁴ Costen goes on to suggest that "this understanding of community created by the kinship system is a reminder that individuals exist as part of the corporate whole. One becomes aware of self, duties, privileges, and responsibilities in terms of others."¹⁴⁵ This sense of cooperation is exemplified in the African adage: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."¹⁴⁶

Returning service means participating as an active member of the community and giving back to the community that has helped to shape individual lives. This can be achieved through directed action. Directed action is defined, in this discussion, as action that is intentional, focused and moving towards social, economic, political, spiritual and physical change within society. It

¹⁴³ Costen, 21.

¹⁴⁴ Costen, 21.

¹⁴⁵ Costen, 22.

¹⁴⁶ Costen, 22.

incorporates individual, communal, public and private involvement of persons within as well as outside of the African American community. It also involves rethinking educational systems, mobilizing and redirecting African American dollars, tapping into available resources, reassessing current values and responsibilities and developing a system of support that allows African Americans to do whatever is necessary to bring about practical changes within their communities.

An example of a support system within the community that can be incorporated as a part of a Christian outreach ministry is a mentoring program known as the Birthing Project. This program matches pregnant African American women who are at risk with other African American women who become their "sister friends" and walk with them throughout the entire pregnancy and up to one year after the baby is born. During this time the women address issues of nutrition, contraception, health care for the baby and mother, family support systems and the many other concerns that may arise during and after the pregnancy. The program is designed to reduce the high infant mortality rate of African American babies. Programs such as this, which are developed through directed action, enable African Americans to address the various needs that are currently present within the African American community. Moreover, directed action can strengthen a sense of kinship among all African

Americans.

The Christian component of the triple-heritage enables African Americans to live out their Christian faith, while celebrating their distinctiveness as African American Christians. Furthermore, by renewing faith, reaffirming love, and returning service, African Americans can rise above the unique challenges within the African American community and embrace a renewed sense of pride and dignity that allows them to live as valued and contributing members of society.

Implications for Christian Education in the African American Church

The components of the triple-heritage offer three important insights for teaching the triple-heritage in the African American church.

First, a triple-heritage model of Christian education must emphasize the importance of knowing history, especially as it relates to people of African descent. While the African component of the triple-heritage places its primary emphasis on African history which is inclusive of all African people, the African American component lends itself not only to a broad understanding of African history but also to a particular understanding of African American history, which includes the African American experience of slavery, racism and oppression. In a similar fashion, the Christian component of the triple-heritage embraces the

Christian faith tradition while valuing the distinctiveness of African American Christianity.

The triple-heritage challenges the church to provide a holistic educational ministry that seeks to address the needs of the whole person. A holistic approach to Christian education requires a three-fold vision. It must seek to address the intellectual, social, spiritual, physical and emotional concerns of the congregation. It must value the socio-historical context of African American people, which includes their African heritage, African American heritage and Christian heritage. And it must educate African Americans to grow in their faith and inspire them to apply their faith through active participation within the community.

Second, a triple-heritage model of Christian education must be culturally sensitive, encouraging African Americans to celebrate their unique culture and value the contributions of African and African American people. The triple-heritage, which embraces a culturally sensitive approach to Christian education, challenges the church to provide a positive and accurate presentation of African and African American culture, including the contributions that people of African descent have made to society.

A culturally sensitive triple-heritage approach to Christian education also challenges the church to address both the individual and communal needs of the congregation.

In the African American church this would involve reflection upon economic, social, political and racial oppression and how these realities impact both the individual and the community. A triple-heritage model of Christian education should be designed to equip persons to analyze these systems of oppression critically, to develop strategies for addressing these systems and to move African Americans towards social action and transformation. In short, the triple-heritage recognizes the need to empower African American people to engage in historical analysis, socio-political examination and cultural critique. Thus it requires an educational program that stresses a praxis approach to education.

Moreover, a culturally sensitive triple-heritage approach to Christian education challenges the church to draw upon the sources that naturally emerge from African and African American culture such as music, dance, ritual, folklore, art, literature and indigenous modes of worship. These sources can richly enhance the educational ministry by inspiring a sense of creativity, spontaneity and imagination.

Third, a triple-heritage model of Christian education must encourage the African American church to stand in solidarity with persons of African descent in the struggle for freedom and liberation. The triple-heritage challenges the church to address this concern by promoting education

for justice and liberation. Wimberly's model of story-linking may facilitate this effort particularly since her model explores themes of liberation, vocation and decision making through the sharing of personal, biblical and African American faith heritage stories. This model may be broadened to incorporate not only the stories of African American heritage but also the stories, art, literature and other modes of cultural expression that emerge from African heritage as well.

Teaching the triple-heritage will allow African Americans to affirm and celebrate who they are as Africans, African Americans and Christians. In order to understand better the challenges and possibilities in teaching this heritage, chapter 2 will examine the history of Christian education in the African American church.

CHAPTER 2

History of Christian Education in the African American Church

In Chapter 1 the triple-heritage was defined as African, African American and Christian. Implications for Christian education in the African American church were also examined through the lenses of African heritage, African American heritage and Christian heritage. This chapter analyzes the history of Christian education in the African American church. This analysis will shed light on the type of Christian education that has been provided for African Americans historically and identify some of the challenges facing African American educators today.

Education has always been highly esteemed by African Americans. John Lovell, Jr. emphasizes this point as he reflects on education for blacks during the time of slavery. He states that "for thousands of slaves the desire for education was the strongest of desires," consequently "facing the future without education was the most unbearable part of slavery."¹ This desire was revealed in the numerous slave narratives, spirituals and commentaries. According to Lovell, education illuminated the mind of the slaves and awakened within them a deeper longing for freedom and liberation. This longing was so great that it motivated numerous "escapes and attempts to escape" from the bonds of

¹ Lovell, 163.

slavery.²

Historically, education has been a major focus of the African American church. This is due in part, to the fact that under the institution of slavery, many African Americans were denied a formal education. Consequently, by the time the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, the majority of freed blacks were illiterate. The church along with other agencies began to work diligently to address this critical need.

Continuing racial discrimination and segregation in public education both before and after the emancipation also prompted many African American churches to assume responsibility for educating their own people. As a result, black churches, often with the assistance of white churches and philanthropists, established schools such as Wilberforce University in 1856 (African Methodist Episcopal Church), Morehouse College in 1867 (American Baptist Home Mission Society), Paine College in 1882 (Christian Methodist Episcopal Church), and Livingstone College in 1882 (African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church). These schools provided instruction in a variety of disciplines including theology, teacher education, medicine, law and literature.³

² Lovell, 163.

³ Carter G. Woodson, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861 (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 272-73; American Baptist Historical Society, Pursuit of the Promise: The Role of the American Baptist Home Mission Society in the Education of the Freed People after the Civil War (Valley Forge: Judson Press,

The church was also challenged by the fact that, the early educational facilities for African Americans (public and private) were grossly inferior. For example, many black colleges and universities began with poor buildings and inadequate library facilities.⁴ Along with other federal agencies, the church took an active role in upgrading the educational facilities in an effort to also enhance the quality of education for African Americans.⁵

On the positive side, the church was motivated to develop educational programs because African Americans embraced education as an avenue for attaining economic and social empowerment. Through education African Americans believed that they could elevate their social status by improving their language skills, work habits and sense of integrity; by eliminating negative stereotypes which portrayed blacks as ignorant and lazy, and by advancing the economic productivity of the race. The church helped

1992), videocassette; Lincoln and Mamiya, 251-52; James Edward Crayton, Predominantly Black Colleges and Universities: Their Mission, Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1980 (Ann Arbor, UMI, 1980), 10-15; Dwight Wendell Oliver Holmes, "The Beginnings of the Negro College," Journal of Negro Education 3, no. 1 (1934): 168-93. See also Dwight Wendell Oliver Holmes, The Evolution of the Negro Colleges (New York: Negro University Press, 1969).

⁴ Crayton, 32-36; 48-49.

⁵ Crayton, 32-36, 48-49; Frazier, Negro Church in America, 40; American Baptist Historical Society. See also Elizabeth F. Hood, Educating Black Students: Some Basic Issues (Detroit: Detroit Educational Consultants, 1973).

promote this view.⁶

Thus, African American churches have been instrumental in establishing educational institutions and promoting the formal education of African Americans. Their efforts can be seen through the work of educators such as Mary McLeod Bethune, who founded a training school for black girls in 1904, the numerous black colleges designed to provide higher education for African Americans, and local church sponsored schools such as the Holy Name Catholic parish in Los Angeles California. An ethnographic study on youth ministry in various cultures conducted by Mary Elizabeth Moore indicates that education was a more explicit and visible value in this African American parish than in any of six other congregations studied.⁷

The emphasis on Christian education as an ongoing ministry of the church, however, has rapidly declined in recent years. One reason is that over the years, the African American church has focused mainly on preaching and fund raising. As Willard Williams points out, the preacher is the primary fund raiser, thus many African American churches rely heavily on the preaching of the minister to

⁶ Peter J. Paris, The Social Teaching of the Black Churches (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 68-70; Lincoln and Mamiya, 250-51.

⁷ Mary Elizabeth Moore, ed., Youth Ministry in Many Cultures, unpublished manuscript, 1996.

raise conference assessments.* In addition, the preacher is also highly esteemed in the African American church. This tradition, according to DuBois, goes back to the time of slavery when the preacher was embraced not only as a spiritual leader, but "as a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist, . . . the centre of a group of men, . . ." Thus, the African American preacher has acquired a sense of preeminence in the church.⁹ This image of the preacher is still prevalent in many churches today. Consequently, many African American churches are predominantly preaching-oriented.

Also, in many African American churches, Christian education, consisting primarily of Sunday School, is perceived as a Sunday morning program designed mainly for children.¹⁰ This perception has caused many churches to neglect an emphasis on adult participation in the educational ministry. Consequently, African American Sunday Schools are plagued by a lack of participation and poor attendance among adults. Sid Smith confirms this in his assessment of African American Sunday Schools. He estimates that attendance in African American Sunday Schools is only

* Willard A. Williams, Educational Ministry in the Black Community (Nashville: Board of Education, United Methodist Church, 1972), 11.

⁹ DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, 134.

¹⁰ Willard Williams, Educational Ministry in the Black Community, 11.

about 15 percent and that effective Sunday Schools are those that place an emphasis on involving adults.¹¹

Moreover, many African American churches lack the necessary funds to hire a director of Christian education. These programs are heavily dependent upon volunteers with minimal skills.¹² The result is often Christian education programs that are bereft of vision, poorly structured, and functioning with inadequate goals and objectives.

Finally, since worship is the dominant focus in many African American churches, planning for the development and use of educational facilities within the church has often been neglected or omitted. In their study, The Negro's Church, Benjamin Mays and Joseph Nicholson observed that many of the African American churches that they examined either had limited space in their buildings for their Sunday Schools or they had adequate space that was not being used.¹³ Although this study was conducted in 1933, similar problems with the availability and use of space for Christian education still exist in many African American churches today.

These factors have contributed to Christian education

¹¹ Sid Smith, Ten Super Sunday Schools in the Black Community (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), 8, 177-78.

¹² Willard Williams, Educational Ministry in the Black Community, 11.

¹³ Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson, The Negro's Church (1933; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 124-26, 257-58.

ministries that are not fully integrated into the overall life and ministry of the church. While most African American churches have a structured Sunday School, many have failed to provide a comprehensive Christian education ministry that extends beyond the Sunday School and encompasses all aspects of the church's ministry.¹⁴

One way that the church can remedy this problem is to emphasize Christian education from an African American perspective, that is, education that centers around the particular experience of African American people and seeks to make meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ in light of this experience. This understanding also promotes a holistic approach to Christian education that addresses the concerns of the church and community through a well-rounded curriculum that emphasizes the triple-heritage as African, African American and Christian.

In this chapter the history of Christian education in the African American church is examined. This discussion is divided into two sections. The first section includes an historical overview of Christian education for Blacks in America--an effort to identify the social and historical context. The second section analyzes the contemporary trends of Christian education in the African American church. The main point of this study is to identify some of the challenges facing African American Christian educators

¹⁴ James H. Harris, "Christian Education," 15.

and to illuminate some of the positive contributions that are currently being made in the area of African American Christian education.

Historical Overview

The early 1600s marked the beginning of Christian education for African Americans. At that time the subject matter consisted of reading along with the fundamentals of Christianity. As the centuries passed, the primary focus of Christian education for African Americans has changed. The shifts in focus, according to Crockett, were due to the impact of cultural, political and socio-economic factors.¹⁵

In the early years, Christian education for African slaves mainly consisted of catechesis in preparation for baptism.¹⁶ As the institution of slavery continued to evolve, however, conflict over the status of baptized slaves began to arise. The major point of contention centered around the question, Are baptized Christians freed from the bonds of slavery? This issue was settled between 1664-1706 when the colonial courts ruled that baptism did not secure

¹⁵ Joseph V. Crockett, "An African-American Method of Religious Education," Quarterly Review 12 (1992): 58-62.

¹⁶ James D. Tyms, The Rise of Religious Education among Negro Baptists (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), 31; Grant S. Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," in Christian Education Journey of Black Americans: Past, Present, Future, by Charles R. Foster, Ethel R. Johnson and Grant S. Shockley (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1985), 3. See also Henry A. Bullock, A History of Negro Education in the South from 1619 to Present (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

freedom for the slaves.¹⁷ This ruling led to revisions in numerous baptismal services in order to suppress any phrases or concepts related to freedom and liberation. Recognizing a shift in the purpose of Christian education during this time, Grant Shockley states:

Between 1619 and 1666, baptism and Christian education were available somewhat as ends in themselves. After 1667 they were to be means to the end of maintaining the institution of slavery and placating the conscience of the church.¹⁸

Christian education, then, became not only a vehicle for religious instruction, but also an effective tool in support of the institution of slavery.

Later, Christian education shifted not only in its purpose, but also in its level of accessibility to the African slaves. In his book The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861, Carter G. Woodson notes that the history of education for African slaves falls into two basic periods: the support of education for slaves from the beginning of slavery around 1619 until the rise of slave revolts and insurrections around 1835; and the denial of education for slaves, prompted by the fear of further insurrections and a

¹⁷ William Edward Burghardt DuBois, ed., The Negro Church (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1903), 7-8; Woodson, Education of the Negro, 3-4; Crockett, "African American Method of Religious Education," 58; Grant S. Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation to Consummation: A Black Perspective," in Does the Church Really Want Religious Education?, ed. Marlene Mayr (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1988), 222.

¹⁸ Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 4.

shift in the status of slavery from a "patriarchal to an economic institution," brought on by the industrial revolution.¹⁹

Despite these shifts, a number of people were concerned about the education of the slaves. Woodson identifies three types of advocates for the education of African slaves: the slaveholders seeking "to increase the economic efficiency of their labor supply"; the "sympathetic persons who wished to help the oppressed"; and the "zealous missionaries" who sought to promote the Christian faith.²⁰ Of these groups, the greatest contribution to the education of the African slaves was made by the Christian missionaries though the other two groups each contributed as well.

In an effort to track the historical development of Christian education for African Americans, the following discussion reflects the three concerns of the triple-heritage. Thus, it consists of examinations of the African roots of education, the development of educational opportunities for African Americans in the United States and missionary efforts to educate African Americans.

African Roots

In A History of Black Baptists, Leroy Fitts observes that "blacks did not come to America devoid of all culture and education," but rather they brought with them a

¹⁹ Woodson, Education of the Negro, 2.

²⁰ Woodson, Education of the Negro, 2.

grounding in a rich and dynamic heritage.²¹ A part of that heritage included an elaborate system of religious beliefs based on ancient African traditions. Shockley builds upon this notion by elaborating three elements of the religious beliefs of the first African slaves: a high god concept, ancestor worship and magic. He goes on to suggest that, as these religious beliefs fused with Christianity, the "Black Folk Religion" that emerged "informed the content and style of Christian education in black churches, families, and communities especially in the South."²²

Since the African educational system did not center around reading and writing, one might assume that valuable education was not taking place. On the contrary, prior to their arrival in America, Africans had established intricate systems of learning and education was an integral part of the tribal community. Based on vocational training and apprenticeship, the educational system was designed to teach youth artisanship, language, leadership skills and a variety of trades. Olaudah Equiano (Gustavas Vassa), an African slave, born in Guinea, West Africa in 1745 relates the nature of his early educational experience:

²¹ Leroy Fitts, A History of Black Baptists (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 162.

²² Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 234; Grant S. Shockley, "Historical Perspectives," in Working with Black Youth: Opportunities for Christian Ministry, eds. Charles R. Foster and Grant S. Shockley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 9-10.

Agriculture is our chief employment; and everyone, even the children and women, are engaged in it. Thus we are all habituated to labor from our earliest years. Everyone contributes something to the common stock; and, as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have not beggars.²³

Education in Africa was a communal experience that required the full participation of each person in the tribal community.

Youth were trained in a variety of vocations, including "basketry, textile weaving, pottery, woodwork, and metallurgy." Agriculture, fishing and blacksmithing, were also common among the tribes.²⁴ Equiano reflects further on the various vocations that were common in his village:

When our women are not employed with the men in tillage, their usual occupation is spinning and weaving cotton, which they afterwards dye, and make into garments. They also manufacture earthen vessels, of which we have many kinds.²⁵

Upon their arrival in America, African slaves were already highly skilled in numerous vocations. They also possessed the capacity to develop new skills and languages as a means of survival in a strange land.

²³ Olaudah Equiano (Gustavas Vassa), "I Had Never Heard of White Men or Europeans, nor of the Sea," in Steal Away: Stories of the Runaway Slaves, compiled by Abraham Chapman (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 21. For additional accounts of slave narratives see B. A. Botkin, ed., Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery (1945; reprint, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1973) and John W. Blassingame, Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

²⁴ Franklin, 18-19.

²⁵ Equiano, 18.

Another important aspect of African education was the oral instruction that emerged through music, dance, poetry, folktales, rituals, proverbs, stories and historical accounts. These cultural vehicles served as viable tools of instruction. For example, storytelling was often used to transmit historical information, to teach the values of society, to correct children, to guide the administration of government, and to teach religious beliefs and practices.²⁶

This aspect of African education was so deeply rooted in African customs and traditions that African slaves continued this form of education even after their arrival in the new world. Since African slaves were not allowed to openly teach their children, they often taught their children through the oral tradition. Ella Mitchell points out that since parents were forced to work from "kin to cain't" (sunup to sundown), elderly grandparents took care of the small children and taught them valuable lessons throughout the day by using stories, songs, folktales and proverbs. She goes on to suggest that "until they were large enough to work, there was plenty of time to listen to tales and take advantage of the peak learning years."²⁷

²⁶ Franklin, 28; Ella Mitchell, 95-97.

²⁷ Ella Mitchell, 99. See also Herbert V. Klem, Oral Communication of the Scripture: Insights from African Oral Art (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981); Ruth Finnegan, Oral Literature in Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); Thomas L. Webber, Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).

When the children began to work in the fields, these elements of the oral tradition continued to be the primary mode of education.

African education consisted not only of vocational training and oral instruction but also of higher education. Such education was available in West Africa and the Near East through the University of Sankore in Timbuktu. Instruction in "literature, law, medicine and geography, science and art," which included "engineering and building trades" was provided by a number of scholars, both African and Arab.²⁸ The academic program was rigorous and it involved scores of students, with a passion for learning.²⁹

Scholars agree that African slaves were highly intelligent and usually came from the upper classes of African society. Slave holders, however, did not value the intellectual abilities of the slaves and seldom respected their rich cultural heritage.³⁰ Thomas Webber comments on the common attitudes and practices among slaveholders regarding African intelligence and cultural practices:

On most plantations slaves were not allowed to sing African songs, dance African dances, or speak African languages. The practice of conjuration was universally outlawed. The very word 'African' was meant to invoke the image of ignorant savagery and the words 'black' and dark' (as in 'darkey')

²⁸ Hyman, 20. See also Diop, 176-192.

²⁹ Hyman, 20; Diop, 176.

³⁰ Fitts, 162; Lovell, 163-64; Barrett, Soul Force, 14-16; See also Franklin, 15-29.

carried connotations of evil, immorality, and ugliness. Blacks were taught that their skin was ugly, that their lips and noses were unaesthetic and malformed, and that they carried a natural smell that was offensive.³¹

Tribal customs, religious practices and communal relationships were also largely ignored. A new set of customs was imposed with little regard for the holistic development of the slaves. This was done through a process of "seasoning" or "breaking in" new slaves.³² In his description of the process of seasoning, E. Franklin Frazier notes that newly enslaved Africans were separated from their families and other members of their tribes as they awaited the "middle passage" or voyage to the new world. They were later packed into ships with no regard for sex, age, family ties or tribal affiliations. When Africans arrived on the plantations they were forced to learn the language of their masters, and to acquire new skills that would prepare them to work on the cotton or sugar cane plantations. Furthermore, Africans were not allowed to assemble for religious practices. All of this, according to Frazier was intended to strip Africans of their cultural heritage.³³

While many slave traders and slave masters did not see

³¹ Webber, 35.

³² Franklin, 49; Frazier, Negro Church in America, 2; C. Eric Lincoln, Race, Religion and the Continuing American Dilemma (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), 62.

³³ Frazier, Negro Church in America, 2-3. For more information on "seasoning" see also Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, 45-53.

the value in educating their slaves, others believed that education would enhance the slaves' productivity and economic worth.³⁴ Those who opposed slavery also favored educating the slaves, arguing that slaves should be afforded the same educational opportunities as white Americans. Missionaries concerned with teaching the Christian faith focused their educational efforts on accomplishing this goal.³⁵

**Education for Blacks in the United States, 1600-
Reconstruction**

A survey of the education of Blacks in the United States from 1600 to Reconstruction may be divided into three major sections: education in the North, education in the South, and education from emancipation through Reconstruction.

Education in the North. Numerous educational opportunities were available for African Americans in the North since slavery was not as prevalent there as it was in the South. Consequently, many schools (public and private) provided instruction for both children and adults. For example, in the District of Columbia, African American children were invited by two white teachers, Henry Potter and Mrs. Haley, to study along with white children. Many

³⁴ Woodson, Education of the Negro, 2-3.

³⁵ Woodson, Education of the Negro, 2-4.

responded enthusiastically to the invitation.³⁶

The Institute for Colored Youth, organized by the Quakers in 1842, provided black youth with a chance to be trained in business and industrial skills. Initially, the school provided courses in the fundamentals of farming, shoemaking, and a variety of other occupations. Later, it began preparing women and men for vocations in preaching and teaching.³⁷

African Americans were also actively involved in providing educational opportunities for themselves. One notable example is Maria Becraft, who established the first seminary designed to educate African American girls during the early 1800s in the District of Columbia. After turning the seminary over to some of her former students, she moved to Baltimore in 1831 and began teaching in a convent.³⁸

Black institutions of higher learning provided another avenue of education for African Americans in the North. Many of these schools were established by black churches with the aid of white religious denominations such as the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Baptist Home Mission Society.³⁹ The schools, however, were heavily controlled

³⁶ Woodson, Education of the Negro, 130.

³⁷ Woodson, Education of the Negro, 268-70.

³⁸ Woodson, Education of the Negro, 133.

³⁹ American Baptist Historical Society, videocassette; Crayton, 11.

and staffed by whites. As a result of the constant restrictions placed upon them by white dominated churches, conflict over slavery, and the need for black leadership and autonomy, black churches began to establish and support their own institutions of higher learning.⁴⁰ Wilberforce University, for example, was the first black college controlled by blacks. Although it was incorporated by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1856, the AME Church purchased the property around 1863 and gained complete control of the university naming the Rev. Daniel Payne as its first black president.⁴¹ In addition to Wilberforce University, other independent schools were later established in the South.

African Americans were not only concerned about establishing their own institutions of higher learning, but also in providing education through the church. In order to gain the freedom to worship and to educate their people free from racial discrimination and limitations placed upon their participation in white congregations, African Americans began to establish their own independent churches.⁴² C.

⁴⁰ American Baptist Historical Society, videocassette; Crayton, 16.

⁴¹ Daniel Alexander Payne, "Education in the A.M.E. Church," in Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness, ed. Milton C. Sernett (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 244, 247-48; Woodson, Education of the Negro, 272-74.

⁴² Carter G. Woodson, The History of the Negro Church, 2nd ed. (Washington D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1945), 61-62; Lincoln, Race, Religion and the Continuing American Dilemma, 62-63.

Eric Lincoln comments on the efforts to establish independent churches and the importance of freedom for African Americans.

The establishment of the Black Church as an independent institution provided dramatic evidence of black capacity for religious responsibility and the determination to achieve it. . . . For the black believer, the Black Church was not only a symbol of God's intention that all men should be free, it was also the instrument of God's continuing revelation of that intent.⁴³

Thus, the desire for freedom inspired African Americans to take responsibility not only for their intellectual development but for their spiritual growth as well.

In order to provide educational opportunities and freedom of religious expression, numerous African American churches were established during this time. For example, The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was started by Richard Allen in Philadelphia around 1787. The AME Zion Church was founded in New York in the early 1800s;⁴⁴ and one of the first Black Baptist churches established outside of the South was founded in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1809.⁴⁵ These churches played an active role in providing religious education for African Americans. This education was carried out particularly through Sunday School programs

⁴³ Lincoln, Race, Religion and the Continuing American Dilemma, 63.

⁴⁴ Woodson; History of the Negro Church, 63-64, 68.

⁴⁵ Woodson, History of the Negro Church, 74-75; Tyms, 111.

that emphasized "knowledge of the Bible as well as training in reading, writing, psychology, history, theology and liberal arts studies."⁴⁶

Prior to the Revolutionary War, African Americans enjoyed a substantial amount of freedom; following the war, however, many of their privileges were denied. Nevertheless, African Americans took advantage of a wide range of educational opportunities that afforded them many privileges, such as economic mobility, social status, and personal fulfillment.

Education in the South. Education for African Americans was greatly restricted in the South. Most slave owners did not approve of educating their slaves, and many believed that education would inhibit the slaves' usefulness and lead to insubordination and discontentment. Eugene Genovese argues that many slaveholders embraced a philosophy similar to that voiced by a president of the Royal Society who strongly opposed education for the working class.

However specious in theory the project might be, of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would in effect be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them fractious and refractory. . . . It would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, and

⁴⁶ Alicia D. Byrd, "Adult Educational Efforts of the American Black Church: 1600-1900," Journal of Religious Thought 44, no. 2 (1988): 86.

. . .would render them insolent to their superiors.⁴⁷

Many slaveholders believed that education and slavery were incompatible and therefore provided only the minimal amount of training necessary to ensure cheap labor and to keep the slaves docile and subservient. As Chancellor Harper, a supporter of the institution of slavery remarked, "the slave receives such instruction as qualifies him for his particular station."⁴⁸ A former slave, Sarah Wilson also comments on the slave holders' narrow view of education for the slaves.

I's larned to read de Bible, an' my chillun larned to read an' write, but our white folks didn't believe in niggers larnin' anything. Dey thought hit would make de niggers harder to keep slaves, an' to make dem wuk. All de slaves dat I knowed couldn't read nor write."

Although many slaveholders opposed education for their slaves, some did allow their slaves to learn moral values from church workers and various missionary societies.⁵⁰

Often slaves received Christian instruction through the

⁴⁷ Quoted in Genovese, 561.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Genovese, 562.

⁴⁹ Quoted in James Mellon, ed., Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember, An Oral History (New York: Avon Books, 1988), 197. Used by permission.

⁵⁰ Charles C. Jones, The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States (1842; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 8-10; Woodson, Education of the Negro, 4-5, 25-26; Tyms, 86-96. See also pages 135-37 in this chapter for a brief discussion of some of the missionary societies that have contributed to the education of African Americans.

religious meetings held on some plantations. These meetings were often supervised by white overseers and white preachers who frequently preached a limited gospel to the slaves. According to Webber, the intent of these meetings was to teach the slaves that God had ordained slavery and "sanctioned the relationship between master and slave." Thus, the slaves were frequently admonished to obey their masters.⁵¹ As Jack White, a former slave recalls,

Marster preach to de white folks Sunday mo'nin'. Den, at night, all de marsters roun' dat country sen' dey slaves, an' he preach to us. He hab two fav'rit tex'es he uster preach from to de slaves. One was, 'Serv'nts, obey your marsters' De other tex' was, 'Thou shalt not steal.'⁵²

In many instances, circuit riders or slave ministers were also allowed to preach and teach the Bible to these congregations, though their messages were greatly restricted due to the presence of the white overseers.⁵³

The pervasiveness of slavery slowed the development of free African American churches in the South. Disputes over the issue of slavery, restricted participation of Blacks in white churches, and segregation hindered the church in providing religious instruction for African Americans. Despite these obstacles, the first independent African Baptist church in the South was founded in Silver Bluff,

⁵¹ Webber, 47-50.

⁵² Quoted in Mellon, 197. Used by permission.

⁵³ Byrd, 87.

South Carolina, between 1773-1775.⁵⁴ Tyms notes that the function of religious education in independent African Baptist churches was to "bring the colored man into a fuller knowledge of the Christian life."⁵⁵ Thus, religious instruction, carried out primarily through Sunday Schools centered around conversion, baptism and church membership.

Laws prohibiting slaves to assemble and ultimately restricting them from learning to read were enacted in response to slave uprisings, which began in the year 1835. Thus, slaves were unable to pursue education openly due to the threat of punishment and possible death. Tom Hawkins, a former slave recounts the punishment received by another slave who had learned to read.

When Dr. Cannon found out dat his carriage driver had larned to read and write whilst he was takin' de doctor's chillun to and f'om school, he had dat nigger's thumbs cut off, and put another boy to doin' de drivin' in his place.⁵⁶

Despite these obstacles, African slaves continued to pursue education in a variety of ways. For example, Ella Mitchell and Thomas Webber point out that slaves disseminated knowledge through the singing of spirituals and

⁵⁴ Woodson, History of the Negro Church, 35; Tyms, 110; Fitts, 33. Fitts points out that there is little agreement on the location of the first independent black Baptist church. While some cite the First Colored Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia as the oldest black Baptist church, others maintain that the Silver Bluff Baptist Church of South Carolina was established first.

⁵⁵ Tyms, 113.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Mellon, 198. Used by permission.

work songs in the fields, the sharing of folktales, stories and proverbs in the slave quarters and through the prayers, testimonies and sermons shared through the clandestine worship services.⁵⁷ Other slaves taught themselves to read and write, as in the case of Thomas Jones, a slave for forty-three years who secretly purchased a spelling book and learned the letters of the alphabet. Thomas recalls, "I set them before me for a copy, and wrote on these exercises till I could form all the letters and call them by name. One evening I wrote out my name in large letters--THOMAS JONES."⁵⁸ Many other slaves learned from other literate blacks, sympathetic slave holders and their children.⁵⁹ Mandy Jones, a former slave describes how the slaves learned to read from the master's children.

De way de cullud folks would learn to read was from de white chillun. . . .an' when dey come out o' school wid deir books in deir han's, dey take de cullud chillun, an' slip off somewhere, an' learns de cullud chillun deir lessons, what deir teacher has jus' learned dem.⁶⁰

Thus, while Christian education for African Americans in the South was greatly restricted, many African Americans still found ways to acquire education as well as promote the

⁵⁷ Ella Mitchell, 99-104; Webber, 191-205, 207-08.

⁵⁸ Thomas Jones, "How I Learned to Read and Write," in Steal Away: Stories of the Runaway Slaves, 80.

⁵⁹ Ella Mitchell, 104; Woodson, Education of the Negro, 128-30; Genovese, 563-66.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Mellon, 198. Used by permission.

importance of learning among their people.⁶¹

Education from Emancipation-Reconstruction. Opposition to African American education persisted at the beginning of this period due to open hostility towards African Americans coupled with numerous laws prohibiting such education. By 1865, however, the opposition began to disappear and education for African Americans began to flourish.

One organization that contributed to the rapid growth and establishment of schools for African Americans after the Civil War was the Bureau for Freedmen, Refugees and Abandoned Lands, also known as the Freedman's Bureau. This organization was established by the federal government in 1865 and continued its work until 1870.⁶² Although the Freedman's Bureau was involved in numerous activities to aid refugees and freedmen its greatest contribution was in the area of education. In cooperation with religious denominations and philanthropic agencies, the Bureau organized and/or supervised a variety of free schools (e.g., day and night schools, industrial schools, Sunday Schools and colleges) for African Americans.⁶³ These schools included Howard University, Atlanta Baptist College (Morehouse College), Fisk University, Hampton Institute,

⁶¹ American Baptist Historical Society, videocassette.

⁶² Horace Mann Bond, The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order (1934; reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 28-29; Franklin, 235.

⁶³ Bond, 29-30; Franklin, 236.

Atlanta University, Biddle University (Johnson C. Smith University), and Talladega College."⁴⁴ Although the Bureau's work was often met with resistance in both the North and the South, J. W. Alvord, the national Superintendent of Bureau Schools, reported that the Bureau employed 9,307 teachers, established 4,239 schools and instructed 247,333 students.⁴⁵

Although the work of the Freedman's Bureau was significant, the contributions of African Americans in developing their own educational institutions should not be overshadowed by the Bureau and other white philanthropic organizations. As James Smallwood points out, African Americans were actively involved in providing their own education by organizing schools, raising funds, constructing school buildings and providing teachers.⁴⁶ For example, in Cotton Gin, Texas, blacks organized a school after purchasing five acres of land and securing a teacher. In a similar fashion, freedmen in Austin raised the funds to completely finance the building of a school that opened in

⁴⁴ Bond, 30; Franklin, 236; Crayton, 11.

⁴⁵ J. W. Alvord, "Semi-annual Reports on Schools for Freedmen," No. 10, cited in Bond, Education of the Negro in the American Social Order, 29.

⁴⁶ James M. Smallwood, "Early 'Freedom Schools': Black Self-Help and Education in Reconstruction-Texas, A Case Study," Negro History Bulletin 41, no. 1 (1978): 790-92.

1868.⁶⁷ One of the most notable contributions to education by blacks was the establishment of a black teacher corps which recruited black teachers to replace those provided by the Freedman's Bureau once its work was completed. According to Smallwood, this corps inspired a sense of freedom among blacks and provided leadership experience which ultimately prepared some teachers to eventually hold political office.⁶⁸ Thus, efforts to advance education for African Americans were common among the freedmen.

After the emancipation of the slaves in 1863, many African American churches began to expand their religious and educational mission to the South. Numerous black churches joined in this effort to educate former slaves either independently or in cooperation with such organizations as the Freedman's Aid Society, the American Missionary Association, the National Freedmen's Relief Association and the National Association for the Relief of Destitute Colored Women and Children.⁶⁹ For example, some churches provided space for schools that could not secure a building or classrooms, as in the case of the first African American school in Galveston which held classes in the black

⁶⁷ Smallwood, 790. For other examples of black self-help efforts see also Woodson, History of the Negro Church, 189-90.

⁶⁸ Smallwood, 791.

⁶⁹ Woodson, History of the Negro Church, 184-86.

Methodist Church.⁷⁰ African American preachers supported education by leading their churches in raising funds for building schools. E. Franklin Frazier reported that by 1915 southern churches contributed 17 per cent of the total cost (over \$28,000,000) towards the Julius Rosenwald Fund which was responsible for the building of 5,000 schools.⁷¹

Preachers such as Rev. Campbell, pastor of the African Baptist Church of Galveston, also supported education by conducting academic courses along with their church responsibilities.⁷²

Various denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Baptist Church were also instrumental in providing educational opportunities for African Americans. For example, the AME church participated in the effort to educate freedmen by establishing numerous Sunday Schools. According to Woodson, between 1864-1868 the Sunday School in the AME church had expanded to "40,000 Sunday School pupils and 39,000 volumes in school libraries."⁷³ Leadership training in religious education and biblical studies was also provided for Sunday School

⁷⁰ Smallwood, 791.

⁷¹ Frazier, Negro in the United States, 429; Frazier, Negro Church in America, 40.

⁷² Smallwood, 791.

⁷³ Woodson, History of the Negro Church, 190.

teachers.⁷⁴

The African Baptist Churches, with the support of the American Baptist Home Mission Society contributed to the intellectual development of African Americans by not only establishing Sunday Schools, but Christian schools designed to train ministers and other leaders, who would in turn be responsible for educating the masses. These schools focused primarily on teaching religion and the three R's.⁷⁵

The benefits gained from the efforts to educate African Americans during this time include organized elementary school programs, financial assistance to poor schools, teacher training and recruitment, and night schools for working adults. Thus, the first great programs of organized education for African Americans were organized during this time.

The need for trained ministers and church leaders contributed to the growth of religious education among African Americans. The main goal was to provide quality training for ministers, teachers and tradesmen. The curriculum included teacher training, religious instruction and biblical studies. One of the leading advocates of

⁷⁴ Lonzy Edwards, "Religious Education by Blacks during Reconstruction," Religious Education 69, no. 4 (1974): 418; Grant S. Shockley, "The A.M.E. and A.M.E. Zion Churches," in The History of American Methodism, vol. 2 (New York: Abingdon, 1964), 543-44.

⁷⁵ Tyms, 133-34; American Baptist Historical Society, videocassette.

religious education during this time was Daniel A. Payne, a Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church who was particularly concerned with improving the educational level of ministers and lay leaders in church.⁷⁶ In order to improve the quality of education, Payne encouraged teachers to attend weekly training classes and to build good libraries containing a Bible, a Bible Dictionary, and a variety of books on history, psychology and teacher preparation. In addition, he stressed the importance of including charts and maps in every school.⁷⁷ As president of Wilberforce University he also combined religious instruction and secular education.⁷⁸ Payne's view of education, however, was met with resistance by those opposed to an educated ministry.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, he persisted in his convictions and continued to stress higher educational standards for all ministerial leaders.

By the early 1900s, two competing views in the philosophy and process of education began to emerge. W. E. B. DuBois was a strong advocate of liberal education, which

⁷⁶ Payne, 244-45; Woodson, History of the Negro Church, 150-51.

⁷⁷ Josephus R. Coan, Daniel Alexander Payne, Christian Educator (Philadelphia: A.M.E. Book Concern, 1935), 123-24.

⁷⁸ Coan, 123; Woodson, Education of the Negro, 273; Woodson, History of the Negro Church, 215.

⁷⁹ Payne, 245-46; Woodson, History of the Negro Church, 150-51.

promoted the development of black leadership, while Booker T. Washington worked diligently to advance industrial education, which sought to enhance the labor force among blacks. Political leaders, educators and church officials, were divided on this issue. Nevertheless, the African American church continued to provide educational opportunities for African Americans despite the escalating debate between industrial and liberal arts education.⁸⁰

Missionary Efforts to Educate Blacks

Many participated in the effort to educate the slaves. One of the first to take up this task was the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), chartered in 1701 by the Church of England. In 1702, Samuel Thomas was sent by SPG to work among the slaves in South Carolina. His main objective was to convert them to the Christian faith.⁸¹

In a similar fashion, the Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers, took an interest in educating the

⁸⁰ See Herbert Aptheker, ed., The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906-1960, by W. E. B. DuBois (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973); Booker T. Washington, An Autobiography (Atlanta: J. L. Nichols and Company, 1901); August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington (1963; reprint, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966); John T. McCartney, Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African-American Political Thought (1922; reprint, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); James D. Anderson, The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 28-32, 102-09; Byrd, 90; Fitts, 212-16; Paris, Social Teaching, 70-71.

⁸¹ Charles Jones, 8-10.

slaves. While emphasizing conversion and providing instruction in reading, the Quakers promoted the human value and dignity of the slaves. The slaves were offered church membership and allowed to participate in these congregations as equals. Since the Quakers openly protested against slavery, many slaves found refuge along with opportunities for education in the Quaker settlements.⁸²

The Moravians came to America in 1738 specifically to evangelize Indians and blacks. Although they attempted to establish missions exclusively for blacks in the South, the missions were largely unsuccessful.⁸³ Despite these shortcomings, Shockley notes two distinctions in the educational efforts of the Moravians. They promoted equality and biracial educational opportunities and their religious education was designed to encourage church membership rather than "just Christianization and baptism."⁸⁴ Like the Quakers, the Moravian settlements were considered safe havens for fugitive slaves.

In 1747, Samuel Davies led a Presbyterian organization, The London Society for the Promotion of Religious Knowledge Among the Poor, in preparing slaves to live in freedom, religious faithfulness and morality. This work was so

⁸² Woodson, Education of the Negro, 43-44; Tyms, 90; Byrd, 85.

⁸³ Charles Jones, 30-34.

⁸⁴ Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 6-7; Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 223.

significant that in 1787 the Presbyterians publicly affirmed that their primary concern was to provide blacks with a good education so that they would be prepared for freedom.⁶⁵

Africans also benefitted from the religious and secular instruction provided by the Catholics. Despite laws and sentiments against the education of slaves, the Catholics continued to teach slaves not only reading and religious instruction but whatever was necessary to promote a full and meaningful life.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Catholics prepared African adults to teach in their own communities.⁶⁷

Although rooted in segregation, both the Methodists and the Baptists provided important educational opportunities for blacks. The Methodists established Sunday Schools for blacks in the 1780s and the Baptists provided Christian education and church membership based on conversion.⁶⁸

By 1835, the prevailing view on educating African Americans had progressed through three basic levels. As Woodson points out education was initially accepted as a means to teach Christian values. Later, education was prohibited when enlightened slaves began to challenge the

⁶⁵ Charles Jones, 35-38; Woodson, Education of the Negro, 74; Tyms, 91-93.

⁶⁶ Woodson, Education of the Negro, 11, 108, 138, 183.

⁶⁷ Byrd, 85.

⁶⁸ Addie G. Wardle, History of the Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1918), 45-49, 52-65; Tyms, 93-97.

institution of slavery, consequently, memory became the only acceptable method for teaching slaves. Ultimately, since many slaves persisted in their quest for education, all forms of instruction for slaves were forbidden by law.” While many factors threatened the educational efforts for African Americans, these elements were unable to discourage the significant progress that would inevitably benefit the slaves and equip them to live more fully as contributing members of society.

The Sunday School movement in the United States also played a significant role in the education of African Americans from the mid-1820s to the Civil War. Woodson comments on the value of the Sunday School during this time.

The ‘Sabbath-school’ constituted an important factor in Negro education. Although cloaked with the purpose of bringing the blacks to God by giving them religious instruction the institution permitted its workers to teach them reading and writing when they were not allowed to study such in other institutions. Even the radical slaveholder was slow to object to a policy which was intended to facilitate the conversion of men’s souls. All friends especially interested in the mental and spiritual uplift of the race hailed this movement as marking an epoch in the elevation of the colored people.”

The Sunday School, then, was vital to the early religious education for African Americans and contributed to their intellectual and spiritual development.

Before the Emancipation, only a few Sunday Schools were

” Woodson, Education of the Negro, 12.

” Woodson, Education of the Negro, 124.

conducted for blacks throughout the North and the South. In the South, Sunday Schools were connected to the white churches on the plantations and oral instruction, conducted by whites, was the common mode of teaching.²¹ As previously noted, this practice was due to the numerous laws and sentiments against teaching slaves to read and write. By contrast, black Sunday Schools in the North were often sponsored by churches, or private organizations. For example, the African Methodist Episcopal church conducted Sunday Schools in New England, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Washington, D.C.²² A variety of materials such as books, stories, hymnals, catechism, creeds, confessions of faith, and bible readings were often used in Sunday Schools during this time. Providing both a religious and secular curriculum, the primary purpose was to build moral character and to provide instruction in the Christian faith.²³

After the Emancipation, Black Sunday Schools began to deteriorate since increased attention and funding went

²¹ Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 35; Tyms, 119; Woodson, Education of the Negro, 184-87. See also Charles Jones, 92-99.

²² Lynn and Wright, 34-35. See also Charles Jones, 89-92.

²³ Frank Glenn Lankard, A History of the American Sunday School Curriculum (New York: Abingdon Press, 1927), 62-64; Marianna C. Brown, Sunday-School Movements in America (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901), 19-23; Jack L. Seymour, From Sunday School to Church School: Continuities in Protestant Church Education in the United States, 1860-1929 (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1982), 28; Wardle, 63.

towards the secular education of freed slaves and the formation of black colleges. As indicated earlier, many institutions of higher learning for African Americans were established during this time assisted by the Freedman's Bureau, denominational churches and other philanthropic organizations. Thus, as Shockley points out the task of the Sunday School was left in the hands of Northern missionaries or black churches working in the South with minimal support. This time period in general marked "a low point in Christian education among blacks."¹⁰

Between 1895 and 1908, the International Sunday School Association (ISSA) attempted to address the needs of declining Sunday Schools by appointing black field secretaries who provided training, resources and guidance to black Sunday Schools, particularly in the South. Since other denominations also implemented similar staff positions around the same time and failed to fulfill their financial commitments in support of the field workers, this effort was unsuccessful.¹¹ From 1908-1930 the ISSA began to focus its attention on religious education training programs through the black colleges. While this effort yielded limited results, it did help to improve the quality of teaching in

¹⁰ Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 10.

¹¹ Tyms, 157-59; Lynn and Wright, 73-74; Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 10; Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 224-25.

many black Sunday Schools.”

Although the Sunday School Movement thus made important contributions to Christian education for blacks in America, it was also ineffective in a variety of areas since limited objectives established for black Sunday Schools were not realized. For instance, only inferior religious instruction was provided for free blacks and slaves, Sunday Schools were segregated and promoted racism, prejudice and discrimination, and Sunday Schools were sometimes closed so that churches could maintain funding from slaveholders.”

These shortcomings prompted black denominations to take an active role in the educational efforts for black people. For example, during the 1880s the African Methodist Episcopal church began to reproduce church school literature exclusively for black Sunday Schools and later established a Christian Education Department to oversee education and leadership programs. In a similar fashion, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church organized a Board of Christian Education in 1932 which included the Sunday School and youth programs.” Finally, black Baptists formed the

” Tyms, 157-61; Shockley, "Christian Education in the Black Church," 10-11; Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 225.

” Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 7-9; Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 224-25.

” Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 11-13; Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 224. See also Lynn and Wright, 34-38; 74-76.

National Baptist Convention in 1895 in an effort to gain control of their own religious work among blacks. Since religious education was the central focus of the convention, organizations such as the National Baptist Publishing Board, the Sunday School Congress and the Baptist Young People's Union Board (B.Y.P.U.) were established."

Thus Denominational involvement advanced Christian education in three basic ways: (1) Denominational Sunday Schools, Sunday School Unions, Christian education departments, youth organizations and publishing houses were established; (2) denominational literature and curriculum were developed and distributed; and (3) training programs for pastors, church leaders and Sunday School teachers were implemented.

Contemporary Trends

The Sunday School continues to be the most common form of Christian education for blacks today. This seems to be true for African American churches affiliated with both black and white denominations. The late Grant Shockley, formerly Professor of Christian Education at Duke Divinity School, however, argued that this mode of Christian education is largely ineffective in reaching African Americans of all ages.¹⁰⁰

" Tyms, 150-53; 161-65.

¹⁰⁰ Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 13.

A study on "The Sunday Church School," by Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson, in The Negro's Church (1933), mentioned earlier, supports Shockley's claim. Based on data from 609 urban churches representing twelve cities throughout the north and south, and 185 rural churches located in four southern counties,¹⁰¹ Mays and Nicholson identified several problems within the Sunday School. Some of their findings included: (1) poor attendance; (2) declining enrollment of children and youth; (3) lack of space or limited use of facilities; (4) predominant use of uniform curriculum resources; (5) poorly trained leaders; (6) minimal pastoral interest and participation; (7) adult directed youth programs; and (8) traditional Sunday Schools based on conservative Protestant church models.¹⁰² Shockley noted that although Mays' and Nicholson's study was dated and some changes had occurred over the years, it was still descriptive of numerous Sunday School programs in black denominational churches at the time of his observations in 1985 and 1988.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ The data for this study was primarily collected through questionnaires, interviews, observations, church records and reports, stenographic reports and accounts from the directors of the study. For a broader description of the methodology of this study see Mays and Nicholson, The Negro's Church, v, 295-97.

¹⁰² Mays and Nicholson, 123-37, 254-58.

¹⁰³ Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 13-14; Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 241-42.

From his study of African American churches involved in predominantly white denominations, Shockley observed:

The most distinctive characteristic of the black/white religious educational situation was its curriculum resources pattern. Generally, this group used the approved resources of their respective denominations, despite their assimilationist philosophy of interracial relations. The teaching-learning process, therefore, was based on the assumption that the minority group should be assimilated into the major group despite the minority group's felt need to preserve its own integrity.¹⁰⁴

Thus, these churches did not embrace curriculum resources that allow them to explore their faith in light of their distinctive identity.

According to Shockley, the greatest weakness of these Christian education programs was their lack of cultural and ethnic sensitivity. Consequently, they were often irrelevant and unable to address the particular needs of African American people. Furthermore, they typically failed to affirm and celebrate the uniqueness of the African American religious experience.¹⁰⁵

Although many of these shortcomings still persist in a vast majority of black churches, a number of churches have begun to re-think and re-shape their educational programs. As Shockley observes, this new vision towards Christian education has been influenced by two primary factors: the

¹⁰⁴ Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 240.

¹⁰⁵ Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 14; Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 240.

Religious Education Movement, with its emphasis on social involvement, and the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, which challenged the black church not only to affirm its uniqueness but also to take an active role in addressing the concerns of the African American community.¹⁰⁶

In an effort to address these challenges, many African American churches have strengthened their Christian education programs by emphasizing justice and liberation, social and ethical responsibility, community involvement, self-help and self-reliance, self-identity and self-esteem, and indigenous modes of religious expression in light of the Christian faith.¹⁰⁷

In recent years, there have also been some positive developments in curriculum materials and resources for African Americans. Paul Nichols attributed these developments to an increased sensitivity and awareness to cultural and ethnic particularities. Nichols highlighted two significant conferences held in 1970 that were instrumental in bringing attention to these important issues. The first conference was the National Conference of Black Churchmen, which convened in Atlanta; the second was the Krisheim II, which was sponsored by the National Council

¹⁰⁶ Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 225-28, 242-44.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Nichols, "Blacks and the Religious Education Movement," in Changing Patterns of Religious Education, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 184-87.

of Churches and met in Philadelphia. These two conferences explored the meaning of Christian education from an African American perspective and submitted recommendations for curriculum based on the African American experience.¹⁰⁸

Some of the curriculum resources that have emerged since these conferences include: the Black Educational Resources Development (1976) designed by the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the United Church of Christ,¹⁰⁹ the New Roads to Faith Packet (1973) designed for black churches; and the Faith Journey Series (1983) designed for predominantly white churches with black members. Both of these resources were developed by the Joint Educational Development project, an ecumenical curriculum project sponsored by the National Council of Churches.¹¹⁰

Since the early 1980s, African American scholars have also been exploring new models of Christian education designed to address the particular needs of the African American church. Although these models are not fully embodied in present educational practices they offer viable approaches to effective Christian education in the African American church. For example, Shockley, proposed a liberation/praxis model that is grounded in the work of James Cone, Paulo Freire and Gayraud Wilmore. Shockley

¹⁰⁸ Nichols, 186.

¹⁰⁹ Nichols, 186-87.

¹¹⁰ Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 227.

refers to this model as an "Intentional Engagement Model." This model stresses self awareness, social awareness, social analysis, transformation, praxis and community involvement.¹¹¹

James Harris, Associate Professor of Practical Theology at the School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, advocates an afrocentric approach to Christian education. Harris argues that the church must encourage cultural literacy by teaching African American history along with biblical studies. He goes on to challenge the church to involve itself in current social concerns. According to Harris, an afrocentric approach to Christian education must undergird all aspects of the church's ministry.¹¹²

Other important work in this area is also being done by Anne Streaty Wimberly who is also making a notable contribution with her story-linking model of African American Christian Education and Joseph V. Crockett with his approach to teaching scriptures from an African American perspective.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation," 244-46.

¹¹² James H. Harris, "Christian Education," 14-18.

¹¹³ See the introduction of this dissertation (pages 5-7) for a discussion of Wimberly's story-linking model and Crockett's approach to teaching scripture in the African American church.

Summary and Conclusion

The history of Christian education in the African American church reveals a pattern of growth and decline. In the early years, the church was actively involved in developing educational opportunities for African Americans. Despite racism, discrimination and other restrictions, it participated in the development of numerous schools and institutions of higher learning to provide African Americans with basic educational skills. It provided leadership opportunities for pastors, teachers and other community leaders. It established itself as an independent institution concerned with the social, moral and spiritual development of the race. And it developed Christian education programs that were relevant and attempted to address the particular needs of the African American community.

In recent years, however, the African American church has not provided effective Christian education programs that address African American concerns. This is primarily due to the fact that many African American churches have patterned themselves after European American churches and adopted Eurocentric modes of worship, education and religious practices. Although the Civil Rights and Black Power movements have inspired many churches to re-examine these practices and to reaffirm their African heritage by exploring new models of Christian education and curriculum

resources that address African American concerns, it is clear that the triple-heritage is not yet fully incorporated in the educational ministries of these churches.

All of this says that the church is ready to explore new ways of developing educational ministries that address the needs of the community and allow African Americans to preserve and celebrate both their faith and heritage. Chapter 3 examines several African American Sunday Schools. The main point of this study is to examine strategies that have contributed to successful Sunday Schools in order to draw insights for building a triple-heritage model of Christian education.

CHAPTER 3

African American Educational Ministries

Having analyzed the history of Christian education for Blacks in America and contemporary educational trends in the African American church, the focus will now shift to a critical examination of African American educational ministries. Although Christian education in many African American churches is declining, some churches are experiencing phenomenal growth. An examination of some exemplars of contemporary churches and their educational ministries will shed light on what makes Christian education successful in African American churches. Since Sunday School is the most common mode of Christian education for African Americans, this study focuses on the Sunday School to reveal something of the larger dynamics of the educational ministry. In this chapter congregational studies conducted by Sid Smith, the founder and president of Black Church Consultants of America and a specialist in building viable Sunday Schools in the African American church, are examined. Smith's studies were selected because of their present-day contribution to the field of Christian education but also because they focus on African American Sunday Schools that have been identified as successful. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to identify key elements that have contributed to the growth of these Sunday Schools and to draw insights from these elements for

building a model of Christian education that embraces the triple-heritage.

Congregational Studies of Sunday Schools

In Ten Super Sunday Schools Smith examined the Sunday School ministries of ten Black churches in America focusing particularly on the question of why these churches experienced tremendous growth. The aim of the study was to provide insights for advancing Sunday School growth in African American churches.¹ His methods consisted of tape recorded interviews directed by prepared questionnaires with the pastor and Sunday School directors, and a site visit to all of the churches. Interviews with the pastor provided most of the data for this study.²

Five limitations were noted at the outset of the study. First, it focused primarily on Baptist churches, with the exception of one church which was nondenominational. The selection of Baptist churches was strictly intended to narrow the focus of the study. Second, successful Sunday Schools were defined by numerical growth. Other growth factors such as increased giving or greater participation in the overall ministry of the church were not examined. Third, the traditional understanding of Sunday School was employed. For example, the Sunday School was defined as the formal teaching that takes place in the church on Sunday

¹ Sid Smith, 10.

² Sid Smith, 12.

morning. Fourth, since some churches produced incomplete records the data was unreliable. In these instances, estimates from the pastor were accepted. Finally, the study was based on data collected only through June 1985.³

A closer analysis of this study reveals further limitations. Although there are numerous churches pastored by women with growing Sunday Schools, none were included in this study. Perhaps they were overlooked because of the traditional view of women in the ministry by many Baptist denominations. The study did not clearly establish the numerical standards for a "super" Sunday School. Thus, there was no set number for Sunday School enrollment (e.g., 200, 500, or 1000) that would define a "super" Sunday School, and it was not clear whether a Sunday School was considered successful based on the number of members on the roll or the number actually attending Sunday School on a regular basis. Moreover, the study did not clarify whether a successful Sunday School was determined by the actual Sunday School enrollment or by the percentage of that enrollment in light of the total church membership. The study did not examine cultural issues or concerns related to the African American church and community. The study relied primarily on questionnaires and interviews, with special attention to pastors. Finally, since most of the churches profiled in this study were Southern Baptist churches, their

³ Sid Smith, 11-12.

denominational materials were heavily promoted.

Despite these limitations, Smith's study provides an interesting portrait of strategies that have allowed these churches to experience phenomenal growth through their Sunday Schools and offers valuable insights.

Five of the churches chronicled in Smith's study will be discussed here: Mission of Faith Baptist Church, Chicago; Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church, Los Angeles; New Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Los Angeles; The Cathedral of Faith, Inkster, Michigan; and New Shiloh Baptist Church, Baltimore. These churches were selected, on the one hand, because they represent a fairly wide diversity in terms of Baptist denominations (Southern Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Churches, USA, the National Baptist Convention of America, the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., the Progressive Baptist Convention, and a nondenominational church even though its roots are found in the Baptist faith) and in terms of size, geographic location and style of ministry. On the other hand, collectively and individually, they represent important growth strategies that may help to enlarge the educational ministries of African American churches.

Smith's work will be presented from three perspectives: an analysis of the common growth strategies that are present in these churches, an examination of at least one strategy that is unique to each church and a summation of the

insights for developing a model of Christian education that embraces the triple-heritage.⁴

Common Growth Strategies

Six strategies appear to have been shared by all five churches. These strategies were analyzed by asking the following questions. What role did each strategy play in the growth of the Sunday School? How did it impact Sunday School growth? What were the strengths and limitations of each strategy?

Pastoral Support. One of the strongest growth strategies for building a successful Sunday School is the support of the pastor. The pastors of all five churches in this study maintained that without the support of the pastor, members of the congregation would find it difficult to see the importance of the Sunday School. They provided support to their Sunday Schools in a variety of ways. For example, at the Mission of Faith Baptist Church the pastor not only promotes the Sunday School from the pulpit, but he is an active leader and teacher in the educational ministry of the church.⁵ In a similar fashion, the pastor of the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist church lends his support to the Sunday School by serving as the superintendent of the Sunday School, participating in the weekly workers meetings and

⁴ This analysis consists of my observations of Smith's study.

⁵ Sid Smith, 51, 53-54.

overseeing the overall Sunday School operation.⁶ In order to develop a successful Sunday School, pastors must be committed to the Sunday School, a fact that is best demonstrated, perhaps through their leadership and presence.

Sunday School Priority. Another important growth strategy shared by the churches is a strong emphasis on the Sunday School in the overall church program. For all of these churches, Sunday School is a high priority. Both pastor and people are committed to church growth through the Sunday School. This means that they are intentional about promoting the Sunday School through the church bulletin, oral announcements, skits, personal invitations, pastoral emphasis and special programs. In at least two of the churches, Mission of Faith and Mt. Zion, everyone who joins the church is expected to enroll in Sunday School.⁷ In all of the churches new members as well as potential members are also encouraged to join the Sunday School through phone calls, home visits and correspondence. As one pastor notes, members of the church should always be aware of the need to reach people for Sunday School. He refers to this awareness as a "constant contact consciousness."⁸ That is, an awareness that people can be enrolled in Sunday School wherever they are--home, school, work or play. Not

⁶ Sid Smith, 101, 103.

⁷ Sid Smith, 55-51, 100-01.

⁸ Sid Smith, 50-51.

coincidentally, these churches strive to maintain high standards of excellence by providing quality resources, well-trained teachers, timely assemblies and classes, and adequate space for the teaching/learning process.

Teacher Training. All five churches share a strong commitment to teacher training. Teacher training is an important growth strategy because it allows teachers to sharpen their skills, stay abreast of current methods, resources and teaching techniques, and maintain the highest standard in their teaching. All of the churches agree that teacher training should be an ongoing process. Seminars and workshops can be offered through the church, or teachers may be encouraged to attend training sessions through outside conferences, denominational meetings or other organizations. The Mission of Faith Baptist Church promotes ongoing training for its teachers by motivating teachers to earn certificates or diplomas through various training programs. This church also emphasizes the need for teacher recognition and appreciation. Teachers who are recognized for outstanding service are often sent to national conferences or to other educational programs as a token of appreciation.*

Another important aspect of this growth strategy that all of the churches embrace is a prayerful selection of Sunday School teachers and workers. These churches seek out

* Sid Smith, 51, 53.

persons who have a sense of calling to the educational ministry and who are willing to participate in teacher training.

Workers Meetings. Another strategy that is specifically related to Sunday School teachers and workers is the weekly workers meeting. All of the churches have some form of weekly meeting designed to assist teachers in the planning and preparation of their classes. These meetings usually consist of planning for the next Sunday's lesson, discussion of important issues or concerns, reflection and review of information, announcements, evaluation, inspirational moments and fellowship. The weekly workers meeting is the highest priority for Sunday School teachers and workers. All are expected to attend these meetings so that they will be adequately prepared to carry out their assigned duties on Sunday mornings and throughout the week.

Church Involvement. This growth strategy emphasizes an "inclusive" Sunday School. This means that everyone in the congregation, regardless of age, is encouraged to participate in Sunday School. For these churches, Sunday School is for the entire congregation, not just for children.

Although many Sunday Schools in African American churches are designed specifically for children, the churches in this study are making a concerted effort to

reach out to adults. One way that the New Shiloh Baptist Church and the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church are reaching adults is by stressing the fact that Sunday School is for the family.¹⁰ By challenging adults to attend Sunday School as a part of the family--whether personal family, extended family or church family, persons of all ages will become involved in the Sunday School. Reaching adults is essential for attaining total church involvement in the Sunday School.

Evangelistic Effort. An emphasis on evangelism through the Sunday School is a priority for all of the churches in this study. This growth strategy is significant for two reasons: It encourages full participation from the entire congregation and it promotes church growth by encouraging members to bring others into the congregation.

The evangelistic effort is advanced in a variety of ways. For example, at the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church, every member is encouraged to participate in personal evangelism. Sunday School teachers are also trained in evangelism and expected to extend an invitation to discipleship in their classes. In addition, an evangelism committee works with the Sunday School department and is responsible for leading evangelistic projects as well as providing opportunities for persons to receive Christ.¹¹

¹⁰ Sid Smith, 100-01, 170.

¹¹ Sid Smith, 102, 106.

Sunday School evangelism is also a priority at the New Mt. Calvary Baptist Church. Evangelistic training is provided specifically for laypersons so that they will be equipped to share Christ through the Sunday School.¹² Finally, the Cathedral of Faith encourages the whole church to participate in door-to-door evangelism. Soul winning in this church is a major part of an individual's responsibility within the church.¹³ From these studies, one can conclude that an evangelistic effort is important to building a viable Sunday School because it not only takes the message of Christ to the world, but also encourages persons outside of the church to become active members in the Body of Christ.

Unique Growth Strategies

While the churches in this study share common growth strategies for building a viable Sunday School, each church also has a growth strategy that is unique. Before describing what these are interpreters should remember that the data from Smith's congregational study was collected in 1985. Much of this information may have changed over the years. The purpose of this analysis, however, is to identify and analyze the unique growth strategies that emerge from these churches in an effort to draw insights for developing a model of Christian education that embraces the

¹² Sid Smith, 114.

¹³ Sid Smith, 149.

triple-heritage.

Mission of Faith Baptist Church. Located in the Chicago suburb of Roseland-Pullman, Mission of Faith Baptist Church is surrounded by a community of 62,000 that has been described as lower middle-class. Although this community is predominantly African American, other racial/ethnic groups are present. The community consists of both blue collar workers and professionals.¹⁴ Mission of Faith Baptist church provides a holistic ministry to the community through its prison ministry, youth job corp programs, senior citizens handicapped program and other Christian social ministries.¹⁵

At the time of this study, Mission of Faith Baptist Church had a membership of approximately 450, with 430 members enrolled in the Sunday School.¹⁶ This church is actively involved with the Southern Baptist Convention and credits the success of their Sunday School to the use of Southern Baptist materials.¹⁷

The growth strategy that is unique to the Mission of Faith Baptist Church is the use of a Vacation Bible School (VBS) transfer plan. This plan is designed to transfer VBS participants who are not a part of the Sunday School onto

¹⁴ Sid Smith, 43.

¹⁵ Sid Smith, 45.

¹⁶ Sid Smith, 44.

¹⁷ Sid Smith, 46, 49.

the Sunday School rolls.¹⁸ The advantage of this strategy is two fold: It encourages persons who may not be a part of the church to participate in Sunday School, and it provides the church with a list of persons who may not be affiliated with a church, thus providing an opportunity for evangelistic follow-up. The limitation of this strategy is that, although it automatically enrolls people in Sunday School, it does not insure their participation after they have been enrolled. Furthermore, inaccurate record-keeping may lead to padding the Sunday School rolls. Thus, a true number of persons enrolled in Sunday School and regularly attending classes is sometimes difficult to obtain.

Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. The greater Watts area of Los Angeles is the home of the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. In the heart of the inner city, the church provides an extensive ministry that begins at home and spans the globe.¹⁹ Some of its ministries include: the World Christian Training Center, an evangelistic outreach ministry; The Lord's Kitchen, which feeds the hungry in Los Angeles; the Mt. Zion Towers and the E. Victor Villa, which provide housing for senior citizens and the disabled; and the Voice of Africa Mission, a boarding school for African students in Liberia.²⁰

¹⁸ Sid Smith, 52-53.

¹⁹ Sid Smith, 82.

²⁰ Sid Smith, 86, 87, 90, 91.

Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church is affiliated with the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., one of the largest African American Baptist organizations in the country.²¹ Mt. Zion places a strong emphasis on education. This is reflected in the fact that approximately 1,100 people, about 60 percent of the church membership, are enrolled in the Sunday School.²²

Starting new Sunday Schools wherever they are needed is the unique growth strategy that emerges from the Sunday School ministry of Mt. Zion. This means that the church is actively involved in starting Sunday Schools in various locations throughout the community. Staff, personnel and resources for these Sunday Schools are provided by the church.²³ Through this strategy, the church is intentional about reaching persons who may not be able to come to the church. This strategy is limited by the fact that many churches may not have the financial or human resources to implement Sunday Schools throughout the community.

New Mt. Calvary Baptist Church. The New Mt. Calvary Baptist Church is located in urban Los Angeles, near the site of the 1965 Watts riots.²⁴ This church is surrounded by a low to lower middle-class neighborhood that is

²¹ Sid Smith, 99.

²² Sid Smith, 100.

²³ Sid Smith, 103-04.

²⁴ Sid Smith, 107.

predominantly African American and Hispanic.²⁵ The ministry of the New Mt. Calvary Baptist Church includes a day care center, an elementary school, a reading program, a clothing and food distribution and a radio broadcast.²⁶

Although the New Mt. Calvary Baptist Church is dually aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention of America, it primarily uses Southern Baptist materials in the Sunday School. Like the Mission of Faith Baptist Church, this church credits the Southern Baptist materials for the tremendous growth of the church. The New Mt. Calvary Baptist Church reports approximately 2800 members (1500-1800 active) on the church rolls with about 1000 members enrolled in the Sunday School.²⁷

The church operates a visitation program through the Sunday School. This ministry has two components: a bus ministry which assists persons with transportation, and a telephone visitation ministry which involves contacting persons within the community by phone. Through the bus ministry, members survey the neighborhood on a weekly basis to determine pickup locations for the Sunday School. The visitation ministry is also carried out weekly through

²⁵ Sid Smith, 107-08.

²⁶ Sid Smith, 110.

²⁷ Sid Smith, 110, 113.

telephone calls made by members of the Sunday School.²⁸

The strength of this growth strategy is that it allows the church to reach the community through the Sunday School by providing a personal telephone contact and transportation. The challenge of this strategy is that it may require a great deal of time, money and people. A strong commitment from members of the Sunday School is essential. In addition, it does not include face-to-face visits, which may be more effective than a telephone call.

The Cathedral of Faith. This nondenominational church is located in Inkster, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. Inkster is described as an upper middle-class community with a mixture of African Americans and Caucasians.²⁹ This church emphasizes prosperity, success motivation and possibility thinking. It also stresses community involvement and outreach (e.g., serving on the Board of Education or the City Planning Commission) which is carried out by the numerous community officials who are members of the church.³⁰

Sunday School is a high priority at the Cathedral of Faith, where 1200 members are enrolled.³¹ Its unique growth strategy is a strong emphasis on combining faith and

²⁸ Sid Smith, 114-15.

²⁹ Sid Smith, 138.

³⁰ Sid Smith, 140-41.

³¹ Sid Smith, 138.

fun. This congregation brings new life to the Sunday School through creativity and the element of surprise. This can be seen in their efforts to attract people to Sunday School by incorporating learning activities and events that are not limited to the classroom. For instance, on one occasion the Church provided helicopter rides for children.³² The advantage of this growth strategy is that it challenges the Sunday School to be intentional about bringing new and creative ideas to the learning process. It also illustrates the need to make learning and experiencing faith an enjoyable experience. Furthermore, it challenges the church to provide holistic learning experiences that go beyond the "banking" method of education. Not every church will be able to provide helicopter rides, but they can focus on making Sunday School more enjoyable.

New Shiloh Baptist Church. The New Shiloh Baptist Church is located in Baltimore, Maryland. It has approximately 3500 members who come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.³³ This church provides a broad-based ministry that includes a radio ministry, printed literature, scholarship assistance and financial support for educational institutions.³⁴ The church is affiliated both with the Progressive Baptist Convention and with the

³² Sid Smith, 149.

³³ Sid Smith, 152-53, 160.

³⁴ Sid Smith, 160.

American Baptist Churches, USA.³⁵

Although the New Shiloh Baptist Church does not have a traditional Sunday school ministry, as defined in Smith's study, (e.g., the formal teaching that takes place in the church on Sunday morning) Christian education is still a priority. In an effort to increase church school attendance and to provide a quality educational ministry, the New Shiloh Baptist Church has implemented an alternative to the traditional Sunday School known as the Saturday Church School.³⁶ The Saturday Church School incorporates a broad-based elective curriculum that provides a variety of courses ranging from Bible studies to personal and academic enrichment courses.³⁷

The growth strategy, then is the notion of expanding the traditional Sunday School to provide courses and programs that meet the physical and social needs of the congregation. This does not mean that the traditional Sunday School must be eliminated as it was at Shiloh, but it does mean that the church must have a holistic vision of the Christian education ministry so that it can assist individuals in all aspects of their personal growth and development. At Shiloh, the flexible curriculum has allowed persons to select courses and various learning experiences

³⁵ Sid Smith, 171.

³⁶ Sid Smith, 162-63.

³⁷ Sid Smith, 162, 165-66.

that are relevant, practical and minister to their needs.

The strength of this strategy is that it challenges the church to offer educational opportunities that address everyday issues and concerns such as divorce, parenting, marriage enrichment, financial planning, college preparation, job skill training and cultural enrichment along with biblical studies. This strategy requires a serious reflection on the role of the church in providing a holistic ministry.

The stories of these Sunday Schools are encouraging and certainly reveal that many African American churches are beginning to make Christian education a priority. The fundamental problem of these churches, however, is that their Sunday Schools are based on European models of Christian education and they incorporate Eurocentric curriculum resources that lack sensitivity to the particular needs of the African American church and community. These churches have also focused primarily on Bible study with little to no emphasis on African American experience and heritage. Nevertheless, these churches can provide insights for building a successful Christian education ministry.

Insights for Building a Triple-Heritage Model of Christian Education

A triple-heritage model assumes respect for, and builds on, existing African American Church communities. Thus, the goal is to enhance existing programs rather than create

something totally new. This implies overcoming various challenges such as inertia, resistance to change and issues related to implementation. Thus, working with the strengths identified in the five African American churches suggests qualities that could be enhanced in African American communities. Also, the qualities might become means by which a triple-heritage model might be formed and embodied. With this in mind, several insights for building a triple-heritage model of Christian education will be examined.

Pastoral Leadership

The first insight that arises from this study is the need for pastoral leadership. Pastoral leadership is important for developing a triple-heritage model of Christian education because a visionary pastor may pass her or his vision on to the rest of the congregation. The pastor can assist the church in capturing the vision by keeping the triple-heritage before the congregation through clearly defining what it is, by affirming its value, and demonstrating its applicability in all aspects of their lives. As members see the triple-heritage continually before them as a natural part of the faith journey, they may be inspired to celebrate who they are as Africans, African Americans and Christians.

Pastoral leadership can not only spark a vision for the triple-heritage, however, but it can also create a passion for it in the whole congregation. If the pastor is

enthusiastic about the triple-heritage, the congregation is likely to be enthusiastic about it as well and gain a deep sense of appreciation for this unique heritage. A sense of appreciation may generate a passion for sharing the triple-heritage with others in the community so that they too may become excited about embracing it.

Moreover, pastoral leadership can encourage persons to commit to growing through the triple-heritage. Growing through the triple-heritage means that the congregation is open to exploring the Christian faith through a triple-heritage model of Christian education. For this to occur, the pastor must be actively involved in all aspects of the Christian education ministry including organizing, teaching, training, promoting the ministry and securing resources.

First Institutional Baptist Church (FIBC) of Phoenix, Arizona, provides an example of how pastoral leadership can assist a congregation to capture a vision, create passion and motivate commitment. In 1982, when FIBC decided to implement a full-time evangelism and discipleship ministry, the pastor began by preaching sermons on evangelism and discipleship. For almost a year the Sunday morning messages described in detail the purpose and benefits of evangelism and discipleship. Each message was delivered with passion. Members were encouraged to pray for the ministry, to share their faith and to become a part of the vision by

participating in Bible studies and other evangelistic activities provided by the church. When the pastor finally submitted a proposal for a comprehensive evangelism and discipleship ministry, the congregation voted to implement the ministry because they had developed a clear understanding of the vision, a passion for the ministry and a commitment to grow through evangelism and discipleship.

Pastoral leadership can play an important role in developing a viable Christian education ministry that embraces the triple-heritage. Through pastoral leadership the congregation can be inspired to receive the vision of the triple-heritage enthusiastically while taking the necessary steps to make the vision a reality.

Teacher Training

The second insight for developing a triple-heritage model of Christian education is the importance of teacher training. Teacher training should take place on at least two levels. It is imperative that teachers maintain the highest standard in their teaching by participating in teacher training workshops and seminars that will allow them to sharpen their teaching skills while staying abreast of current methods, resources and techniques. Such training should be ongoing, drawing upon resources from within the church as well as outside of the church.

Just as importantly, teacher training should involve learning about the triple-heritage. Many teachers involved

in the Christian education ministry may not be equally knowledgeable about all three aspects of the triple-heritage. Therefore, the pastor along with other appropriate leaders need to teach teachers about each element of the triple-heritage. Teachers who may be more knowledgeable about the triple-heritage than the pastor can take an active role in the training as well. This training should also be ongoing, drawing upon experts in each area, community resources and cultural experiences.

Teacher training should also include prayerful selection of teachers who have a vision for the triple-heritage and who feel called to participate in a triple-heritage model of Christian education. An effective way of preparing teachers to teach the triple-heritage is the discipleship model of training. This would involve taking a small group of teachers through an extensive training program that is designed to impart the vision for the triple-heritage, to provide information and resources regarding each element of the triple-heritage, and to explore teaching methods and techniques that would allow teachers to share the triple-heritage effectively. This group of teachers would serve as a core group of leaders who could assist with training other teachers in the ministry, securing and developing curriculum resources, designing the structure of the overall educational program and implementing other administrative duties. These teachers

can also be instrumental in helping other members within the congregation to capture the vision and join in the educational ministry of the church. The program could be implemented through a separate pilot program or by slowly changing the curriculum. Keeping the vision and enthusiasm for the program before the congregation, providing ongoing teacher training and giving regular reports on the program may help to facilitate continuity.

Again, First Institutional Baptist Church serves as an example of how the discipleship model of teacher training can be incorporated. Although this example illustrates how discipleship was used to implement an evangelism and discipleship program in this church, the basic principles can be applied to a triple-heritage model of Christian education. While preparing the entire congregation for a comprehensive evangelism and discipleship ministry, the pastor also began to prayerfully select individuals who were receptive to the vision. These persons were invited to participate in special meetings, training workshops and Bible studies on evangelism and discipleship. After about a year of extensive training, these individuals, along with others who shared the vision, became members of the Evangelism and Discipleship Commission, workshop leaders, Bible study teachers, Disciple Makers (counselors), and administrators of the evangelism and discipleship ministry. Today, the evangelism and discipleship ministry at FIBC is a

viable ministry which undergirds the overall ministry of the church, and is supported by full-time, part-time and volunteer staff.

Teacher training can assist the church in providing quality teachers and administrators who are well trained in the fundamentals of education as well as the triple-heritage.

Nurture

The third insight for developing a triple-heritage model of Christian education is nurture, that is the cultivation, development, encouragement and support of the Christian education ministry. The church must be intentional about nurturing the teachers and leaders in the program. Along with ongoing teacher training, teachers and leaders should be encouraged to participate in weekly meetings at which they receive additional information regarding the triple-heritage, raise questions or concerns, support one another in prayer, and receive assistance with lesson preparation. These meetings may also serve as a forum for teacher recognition and appreciation.

Nurture is not only necessary for teachers and leaders but it is also necessary to nurture the Christian education program. The church must be committed to praying for the ministry. Public prayer will keep the program before the congregation and inspire private prayer, which in turn may lead to more people becoming active. The pastor and church

leaders can nurture a triple-heritage model of Christian education program by capitalizing on every opportunity to highlight the triple-heritage through sermons, announcements, church meetings and special services. The congregation can nurture the program by participating in the ministry and by providing financial support and resources. Finally, nurturing the program will include ongoing evaluation. A praxis model of action, reflection and reformed action will ensure the highest quality of a triple-heritage model of Christian education.

Creative Methodology

The fourth insight for building a triple-heritage model of Christian education is creative methodology. Creative methodology means that teachers are willing to draw upon a variety of teaching methods, techniques and resources from the three traditions to enrich the overall experience of exploring the triple-heritage. The challenge is for the church to incorporate a variety of approaches to Christian education grounded in the triple-heritage such as drama, art, crafts, story-telling, dance, literature, music and poetry, particularly as they emerge from the African, African American and Christian traditions e.g., folklore, ritual and drumming.

Creative methodology also encourages a partnership between the teacher and the learner in which both are mutually involved in the educational process. This

partnership is significant because the triple-heritage relies upon the equal emphasis on all three aspects of the heritage as well as the full participation of everyone involved in the educational process. Olivia Pearl Stokes incorporates a variety of creative teaching methods and techniques that would support the teacher/learner partnership in a triple-heritage model including discussion, experience and travel. Discussion is a favorite of Stokes because it encourages open dialogue.³⁸ Each person in the learning environment has an opportunity to give and receive something through open dialogue. Experience is also valuable because it challenges persons to move beyond the familiar to explore that which is new. For Stokes, this involves bringing people together from all walks of life to share in a variety of cultural experiences that allow persons to learn about other cultures and communities.³⁹ Finally, as one who has traveled extensively throughout Africa and other parts of the world, Stokes advocates travel as a way of gaining wisdom, insight and a deeper appreciation for others.⁴⁰ These educational approaches

³⁸ Olivia Pearl Stokes, telephone interview by Yolanda Smith and Mary Elizabeth Moore, 25 Sept. 1996.

³⁹ Olivia Pearl Stokes, interview by Allen J. Moore, "Oral History Project: Dr. Olivia Pearl Stokes," (Claremont, Calif.: Claremont School of Theology, 1985), videocassette no. 1.

⁴⁰ Olivia Pearl Stokes, interview by Mary Elizabeth Moore, "Oral History Project: Dr. Olivia Pearl Stokes," (Claremont, Calif.: Claremont School of Theology, 1985), videocassette no. 2.

enrich the teacher/learner partnership of a triple-heritage model by creating learning experiences that are based on mutual respect and appreciation.

A triple-heritage model of Christian education will be enriched through creative methodology that allows the church to embrace a variety of learning experiences and resources that can be drawn from each stream of the triple-heritage and used to explore the fullness of the three traditions.

Creative Programming

The fifth insight for building a triple-heritage model of Christian education is creative programming. Creative programming challenges the church to move beyond traditional modes of education (e.g., classroom learning through the Sunday School). The Saturday School developed by the New Shiloh Baptist Church is an example of creative programming. This church preferred Saturdays because it provided more time for actual class study and more flexibility in scheduling and programming. As previously noted the Saturday School offers courses that address the holistic needs of the congregation through an elective program that allows persons to select courses of personal interest.

Although New Shiloh Baptist Church (NSBC) has replaced its Sunday School with the Saturday School, other churches such as First Institutional Baptist Church and Friendship Baptist Church, Yorba Linda, California, have implemented similar programs in conjunction with the Sunday School. For

instance, First Institutional has instituted the Christian Studies Institute (CSI), an elective program offering courses on a variety of topics throughout the week as well as on Sunday mornings. The Institute offers basic and advanced certificates, upon completion of the course of studies, as an acknowledgment of this achievement. It also offers the African American Christian Training School (AACTS) which meets on Saturday mornings and provides courses based on the triple-heritage. While Friendship Baptist Church does not have an established institute like FIBC and NSBC, throughout the week and on Sunday mornings, it offers numerous courses that address both spiritual and personal concerns. These types of programs lend themselves to a triple-heritage model of Christian education because they provide a flexible program that allows members to select courses that meet their individual needs. They also allow members to participate in the traditional Sunday School if they prefer to do so.

Creative programming also allows the church to explore a variety of options for implementing a triple-heritage model of Christian education. The Christian education ministry may offer courses that focus on each component of the triple-heritage. This approach is limited by the fact that the triple-heritage may be interpreted as three distinct components rather than a whole. The triple-heritage may also be implemented throughout the curriculum

resources and examined in all of the courses through the Sunday School and other courses that may be offered at the church. While this may be a viable option, it may also meet some resistance by persons who prefer to focus only on the Christian aspect of the triple-heritage. In this instance, an elective program for persons who are not open to the triple-heritage may help them overcome their objections.

Finally, the triple-heritage may be propagated through all facets of the church experience. The value of this approach is that it does not limit Christian education to the classroom setting which often focuses primarily on printed curriculum resources. Instead, it promotes the view that Christian education takes place whenever the church comes together, whether it be for worship, fellowship, communion, meetings, outreach, choir rehearsals, special programs, family gatherings or bible study.

Creative programming benefits a triple-heritage model of Christian education in that it provides a sense of freedom and flexibility that allows the church to explore various models of Christian education. Although one model of Christian education may work well for one congregation, a combination of several models may offer the best program of study for another. Creative programming makes it possible for a church to consider a variety of options.

Fun

The last insight for building a triple-heritage model

of Christian education is fun. Exploring the triple-heritage can be fun and exciting. As churches draw upon the African American tradition, they will discover various sources that naturally emerge from this tradition that can be used to stimulate fun and excitement in the learning experience. Fun learning experiences that center around the triple-heritage may involve individual class activities, auxiliary projects, family devotions or church events.

An example of a church event that can be used to stimulate fun and excitement for the triple-heritage was incorporated several years ago by First Institutional Baptist Church to celebrate Black History Month. During the month of February, schools, churches and corporate organizations all over the country pause to recognize and celebrate the African American heritage and contributions to the country. This has typically been done through musicals, prayer breakfasts, luncheons, lectures, basketball/golf tournaments, picnics, special media presentations, commemorative worship services and other activities. While these events are fun, informative, and inspirational, the following questions emerge: How much is actually learned about Black history and how much reflection is really done on African American contributions to this country?

With this in mind the church set out to explore an approach to celebrating Black History Month that was experiential and involved exploration and reflection on the

triple-heritage through worship, educational ministry and everyday life experiences. This approach involved all four Sundays in the month of February, each focusing on a different aspect of African American history. For example, the first Sunday focused on African religions, the second Sunday on slave religion, the third Sunday on the Civil Rights Movement, and the fourth Sunday on African Americans in contemporary America.

Each Sunday the sanctuary was arranged so that it set the stage and atmosphere for the time period designated for that particular Sunday. Members were also asked to dress in the appropriate attire that reflected that era. In addition, members were asked to bring any personal items, stories, testimonies, art work, music or any appropriate symbols that might help the congregation experience that time period more fully. The sermon, music and order of worship were adapted as well. Each Sunday, instead of the normal order of worship, the church participated in a worship experience that was common during that time.

This activity generated a sense of excitement throughout the congregation. It motivated members to begin researching the music, styles of dress, religious practices, and general background in order to gain insight into each time period. It also stimulated informal discussion among the members and a sense of anticipation about the next service.

Although this event was designed specifically for Black History Month, a Christian education ministry that centers around the triple-heritage may use such an event like this one as a spring-board for stimulating discussion on various aspects of the triple-heritage throughout the year. For example, members may be encouraged to continue to reflect on and discuss this experience by incorporating personal exercises such as journaling; interviewing senior members in the community, visiting museums, bookstores and art galleries; and participating in community events that center around the African American experience. Sunday School classes, Bible studies and special discussion groups may also build upon this experience through class discussions, field trips and special projects designed to explore the triple-heritage further.

A triple-heritage model of Christian education can be enhanced through learning experiences that are fun and exciting. As the church incorporates new and creative ideas, it will discover that faith and fun can go hand-in-hand. When learning is fun, the church will experience greater enjoyment and participation by members of the congregation.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen what has made some Christian education programs successful. Effective Christian education programs are found where the church is

not concerned solely with religious issues but seeks to address the whole life of the community, where Christian education is seen as a primary function of the church and, accordingly, where it is well integrated into the life of the church. One danger of this survey is the conclusion that an effective, integrated Christian education program is simply a matter of clever organization, attractive advertising, more teacher training or better funding. But since, as argued in this dissertation, it is precisely the recovery of the triple-heritage which is necessary for African American churches to address the needs of their communities, it follows that Christian education programs, to be fully integrated into the church, must also teach the triple-heritage as the core of their curricula.

While all of the churches analyzed in this study incorporated numerous growth strategies for developing their Sunday Schools, only one of the churches mentioned an emphasis on their African American heritage in light of their Christian faith. This suggests that while some African American churches are busy trying to grow their Sunday Schools, often using curriculum resources designed by writers with no sensitivity or understanding of African American culture and concerns, they are in danger of losing the legacy of their rich heritage. Although I was able to glean some valuable insights from the growth strategies incorporated by these churches and examined these strategies

as possible guidelines for developing a triple-heritage model of Christian education, it was clear that many of these churches did not appear to be as concerned about preserving and celebrating their African American heritage as they were about preserving and celebrating their Christian heritage. If a Christian education program is to be integrated into the life of the church, it will do so because it grows out of, and is shaped by, the triple-heritage. In the next chapter this issue will be explored more fully by evaluating African American curriculum resources.

CHAPTER 4

Curriculum Resources

The examination of the growth strategies that emerged from Smith's congregational studies has provided valuable insights for developing a triple-heritage model of Christian education. An important part of any Christian education ministry is the curriculum that informs not only the educational ministry but the overall life of the church. This chapter will evaluate four curriculum resources designed for, and currently used in, African American churches. The purpose of this comparative study is, first of all, to examine whether or not the triple-heritage is present in these materials. Second, this study analyzes the usefulness of these materials for an African American Christian education ministry that embraces the triple-heritage. This chapter concludes with a reflection on the implications for Christian education in the African American church.

Several limitations must be noted at the outset of this study. Due to time and space limitations, only four curriculum resources were examined. Although there are numerous resources available with African American themes, it was not possible to examine all of them in this project. Another research study is needed in order to assume this task. For the same reason, only a sample of these materials was examined. The sample included materials for all of the

age levels from each curriculum resource for one quarter, and included student books and teacher's guides. Also, the materials represent several quarters, ranging from the winter of 1983 through the winter of 1997. One set of materials covers a two year cycle and is not dated. The materials are also limited denominationally. One came from an African American Baptist denomination; the other three are nondenominational, though one of these was obtained through a Baptist publishing house. Finally, the focus was mainly on the triple-heritage components present in the materials. Although an overall evaluation of the materials was made, the primary concern was whether, and to what extent, the triple-heritage was present.

Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable information about the presence of the triple-heritage in the curriculum resources that are currently available for African American churches. This information can assist churches in selecting materials that would enrich a Christian education ministry embracing the triple-heritage.

Curriculum Resources and the Triple-Heritage

The curriculum resources included in this study are: **Faith Journey Series: Christian Education and the Black Experience**, published by Geneva Press; **Echoes** published by David C. Cook; Urban Ministries, Inc., Sunday School Lessons; and the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., Sunday School Materials, published by the Sunday School

Publishing Board. These resources were selected because they are all series that are designed for use in African American churches. Also with the one exception, these materials are nondenominational.

These resources are examined from two standpoints. They are analyzed individually to determine the presence of the triple-heritage in each resource and then compared to each other to evaluate the usefulness of each as a resource for a Christian education ministry that embraces the triple-heritage.

The Curriculum Resources Examined

In this section the curriculum resources are examined individually in order to determine the presence (or nonpresence) of the triple-heritage. The questions used to guide this examination are as follows. Is the triple-heritage present? If so, to what extent? Is each element of the triple-heritage presented fully throughout the material or is one element more dominant than others? How well is the triple-heritage integrated or synthesized throughout the material? Are the images of African Americans presented in these materials positive and liberating or negative and oppressive? Can these materials be used effectively in a Christian education ministry that embraces the triple-heritage? What is the process of education used in these resources and how does it relate to the triple-heritage?

Faith Journey Series: Christian Education and the Black Experience. The Faith Journey Series is a Bible-based resource that draws upon African American experience. This material is nondenominational and is intended for use in churches of all backgrounds. It is also designed for use in various educational settings such as Vacation Bible School, after school study classes, and seasonal events such as Black History Month or the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. Its contributors include African American writers, artists and editors. Published by Geneva Press, the Faith Journey Series serves a dual purpose: to supplement denominational curricula and to illustrate how Bible stories and faith heritage stories from various cultures can be related.¹

The Faith Journey Series is a two year cycle of materials that incorporates three age groups: Level One for 5-7 year olds; Level Two for 8-12 year olds; and Level Three for youth and adults. Levels One and Two provide separate leaders guides and student books for the fall, winter and spring quarters. Level Three consists of six mini-courses--two each quarter in a single book. An intergenerational guide is designed for use in the summer.² The two-year cycle is organized quarterly; however the quarters are not dated individually (e.g., Spring 1995). They are identified

¹ "Three Sample Lessons," Faith Journey Series: Christian Education and the Black Experience (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1983), 4-6.

² "Three Sample Lesson's," Faith Journey Series, 4.

instead, as Fall-Year One. Although this allows the materials to be used during nonspecified years, it only provides a two-year cycle that ends when this time period is over.

The triple-heritage is present throughout the materials. For example, in all three age levels, the lessons incorporate a personal or contemporary story, a biblical story, and a faith heritage story, song, poem or biographical sketch of an African American role model. Although each aspect of the triple-heritage is present in each grade level, they are not always present together in each lesson. Thus, in one session for 8-12 year olds, entitled "God Calls Moses," the lesson begins with the biblical story of Moses' call, based on Exodus, chapter 3. The lesson then moves to a reflection and written activity on Black leaders in Ancient Egypt. The lesson closes with a poem by Langston Hughes entitled "Freedom" and offers questions for reflection and application.³ In session three of the same series, entitled "God Calls Samuel," the lesson begins with an opening activity based on contemporary living. It moves to a skit based on the biblical account of Samuel's call by God in 1 Samuel 3:1-10. It closes with a

³ Montrose Bushrod, "God's Family Serves Others," Faith Journey Series: Christian Education and the Black Experience, Level II, Fall-Year One, (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1983), 7-10.

reflection and written activity on Andrew Young.⁴ In session two, all three aspects of the triple-heritage are present, but in session three, only the Christian and African American aspects are present.

The Faith Journey Series does a good job of integrating and synthesizing all three aspects of the triple-heritage. The stories are discussed in relationship to one another and the activities are relevant to the overall theme and discussion. The African American images presented throughout this curriculum resource are positive and liberating. The writers have been intentional about avoiding stereotypes and presenting Africans and African Americans in a realistic manner. The images, stories and literature reveal Africans and African Americans overcoming oppression and great obstacles.

Regarding the teaching process, the Faith Journey series incorporates a variety of approaches to the lessons. For example, Levels I and II typically begin with an informal activity such as a craft, show and tell and/or a game to gather the children. Once all of the children have arrived, the formal lesson may consist of a biblical story and/or activity, a faith heritage moment which may include a song, poetry, historical information, a biographical sketch or a litany that focuses on the African and African American

⁴ Bushrod, "God's Family Serves Others," Faith Journey Series, 11-14.

experience, and some type of application consisting of a reflection activity, a written project or a song. Although the lessons may begin with the faith heritage story, they mostly follow the format outlined above. Levels I and II also incorporate a variety of teaching methods including storytelling, dance, pantomime, arts and crafts, singing, litany, discussion, journaling and other written activities.

Level III, consisting of the mini-courses, incorporates even more variety in approaching the lessons. For example the format for the mini-courses entitled "Working Well" and "Working Wisely," include: the Biblical text and brief commentary; an activity designed to explore the text or to introduce a related activity or faith heritage story; and a faith heritage poem, song, biographical sketch or historical anecdote.⁵ By contrast the mini-courses entitled "Who Am I?" and "Who Are My People?" often include: a contemporary or African American story that integrates the scriptures; a rap session; an activity (such as a panel discussion, role-playing, singing, creative writing, drawing, painting or crossword puzzle); and suggested readings from the biblical text or other resources from African and African American heritage. Several African American spirituals are also

⁵ Marie Buncombe, "Working Well/Loving Wisely," Faith Journey Series, Level III, Fall-Year One, (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1983), 3-38, 39-64.

included in these courses.⁶ The mini-courses entitled "Do Justice and Love Mercy" and "Transformed or Conforming-Values" consist of a variety of approaches to the lessons, including: an introductory activity; background reading from the biblical text or other recommended sources; analyzing and interpreting the readings; reflection questions; exploring contemporary issues and concerns affecting African Americans; role playing; written activities; and Bible study.⁷ All of the mini-courses also incorporate other teaching methods such as large and small group discussions, field trips, and guest speakers. In addition, the student/teacher participation patterns are also diverse allowing students and teachers to share equally in the learning process.

By incorporating a variety of teaching/learning methods and techniques, the Faith Journey series provides flexibility that allows full integration and exploration of the three aspects of the triple-heritage.

This curriculum resource can be used effectively in a Christian education ministry that embraces the triple-heritage. It may require additional activities, however,

⁶ Harold Sussewell, "Who Am I?/Who Are My People?" Faith Journey Series, Level III, Spring-Year One, (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1983), 4-35, 36-64.

⁷ Gladys Margaret Williams, "Do Justice and Love Mercy/Transformed or Conforming-Values," Faith Journey Series, Level III, Winter-Year One, (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1983), 4-34, 35-64.

such as field trips and guest speakers for children and youth, and more integration of art and dance for adults. In-depth discussions of the triple-heritage could be included at all levels. The organization of the lesson plans in the leaders' guides is confusing at times and should be rewritten providing more explanation on how to use the materials. Additional background information would strengthen some of the lessons, particularly the level three lessons for youth and adults. Finally, more variety in the approach to the lesson format for levels one and two would provide more flexibility in exploring all three aspects of the triple-heritage more fully.

Echoes. The Echoes curriculum resource is produced by David C. Cook. Like the Faith Journey Series, Echoes is nondenominational. It is published in cooperation with black denominations by SMS, Inc.* This curriculum resource has two versions: the multicultural version, Bible in Life, and the African American version, Echoes. A separate team of African American writers, editors and contributors creates Echoes. For the most part, however, the two sets of materials are parallel.

Echoes is a quarterly series based on the International

* "Adult Teacher's Commentary," Echoes, Sept.-Nov. (Colorado Springs: SMS, 1996), 2. The specific denominations that contribute to this effort are not listed in the resource.

Sunday School Lessons.⁹ The materials examined in this study are from the fall quarter 1996. Materials are available for both students and teachers including a separate student book and teacher's commentary for each age level. The Echoes series is divided into five age groups: Nursery (ages 2-3), Kindergarten (ages 4-5) Primary (ages 6-8) Junior High (ages 12-14)¹⁰ and Adults. At each age level, all of the lessons progress through four phases: Life Need--a personal or contemporary story or issue; Bible Learning--a biblical story or passage of scripture; Bible Application--an application of the scripture passage; and Life Response--a challenge for personal action and/or change.

Although Echoes claims to be "Bible-based, Christ-centered and ethnically identifiable,"¹¹ it does not

⁹ "Comprehensive Bible Study: Teaching God's Resounding Word," Echoes, Sept.-Nov. (Colorado Springs: SMS, 1996), 2. Lessons are based on the International Sunday School Lesson for Christian Teaching, copyrighted in 1992 by the Committee on the Uniform Series.

¹⁰ The ages for Junior High students is not listed in the Echoes materials. However, the American Baptist edition of the Bible in Life Teacher's Guide indicates that the Junior High materials are for grades 7-9, ages 12-14. Since these materials are parallel with the Echoes materials it is assumed that the same ages apply to the Echoes materials. See "Junior High Teacher's Guide," Bible in Life, Sept.-Nov. (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 1996), 83. It is also interesting to note that there are no specific materials for children ages 9-11 and youth ages 15-18 in either of these resources.

¹¹ "Adult Teacher's Commentary," Echoes, 3; "Junior High Teacher's Commentary," Echoes, Sept.-Nov. (Colorado Springs: SMS, 1996), 3; "Primary Teacher's Commentary," Echoes, Sept.-

incorporate the triple-heritage fully throughout the material. The Christian aspect of the triple-heritage dominates the majority of the lessons. It appears as though the material was created for a more generic audience and later adapted for African Americans by including a paragraph, a sentence, a theme or a buzz word from the African American experience. This is confirmed by a comparison to the Bible in Life version of the curriculum resources. The majority of the material was identical, with the exception of a few lines reflecting African American experience and pictures of African Americans in the Echoes materials. Bible in Life shows pictures of persons from the dominant culture or other ethnic backgrounds.

The triple-heritage is not integrated well throughout the material. The African American themes are rarely related to the scripture lesson or to the contemporary/personal stories that usually introduce the lesson. In some adult lessons, an attempt is made to begin lessons with African American themes, to draw conclusions relating to the African American experience or to challenge the African American community at the end of some of the lessons. In the nursery materials a contemporary story about missionaries to Africa is shared in an effort to

Nov. (Colorado Springs: SMS, 1996), 3; "Kindergarten Teacher's Commentary," Echoes, Sept.-Nov. (Colorado Springs: SMS, 1996), 3; "Nursery Teacher's Commentary," Echoes, Sept.-Nov. (Colorado Springs: SMS, 1996), 3.

reflect on African culture. The other age levels do not incorporate much of the African American experience at all.

In all of the teachers' commentaries and the student books from nursery to junior high, one finds pictures, cartoons, and drawings that portray African Americans in a positive light. In the children's books, however, the biblical characters tend to be portrayed with white features whereas the other characters tend to have African American features (e.g., dark skin, kinky hair and thick lips). In one instance, in lesson three of the junior high materials (The Rock), a stereotypical inference is made regarding African Americans. The lesson, entitled "Dabbling in Disobedience," begins by reflecting on disobedient youth who find themselves involved in gangs, violence and criminal activities. By contrast, the multicultural version of this lesson is entitled "Dabbling in Danger" with the central focus on occult activity.¹² The implication is that African American youth are more involved in gangs, violence and criminal activities than other youth. This is not necessarily the case. All youth are exposed to a variety situations that could lead them into any one of these activities.

Regarding the teaching procedures, each age level of

¹² "The Rock," Echoes, Sept.-Nov. Lesson 3, (Colorado Springs: SMS, 1996), 2-8; "The Rock," Bible in Life, Sept.-Nov. Lesson 3, (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 1996), 2-8.

the Echoes materials, as previously noted, incorporates the same general approach to the lessons: Life Need, Bible Learning, Bible Application and Life Response. The purpose of each lesson is to focus on the meaning and application of the biblical text in contemporary life. At the children and youth levels, Echoes incorporates a variety of teaching methods and techniques including storytelling, singing, arts and crafts, dance, dramatic play, games, rap sessions, worksheets and role playing. The adult lessons tend to focus more on reflection questions and written activities.

Although the Echoes Comprehensive Bible Study materials do attempt to incorporate various aspects of the African American experience, it is not suitable for use in a Christian education ministry that embraces the triple-heritage. The teaching procedures in the Echoes materials are designed to emphasize the Christian aspect of the triple-heritage. By moving through a set format centered on the Bible, the three aspects of the triple-heritage are not fully integrated; indeed the African and African American aspects are sometimes completely lost. Thus, the materials do not include many references to historical events, African American role models, music in the Black tradition, or literature and art by Africans or African Americans. For example, the kindergarten and nursery materials include a worship segment where children are taught praise songs and prayers. None of the lessons included spirituals or gospel

songs from the African American tradition, thus missing an excellent opportunity to expose children to this aspect of their culture. Also, some of the contemporary/personal stories in the adult and junior high materials could draw more upon African American history or African American role models who have overcome incredible odds.

Another reason for not recommending this material is that, when African American themes are addressed, the lesson does not probe pertinent issues or explore the African American experience or culture very deeply. These themes are usually mentioned as a way of introducing examples, propositions for living or challenges for African Americans to make changes in their lives.

This material could be strengthened in at least four ways: by drawing more upon African American cultural experiences; by integrating the triple-heritage more fully throughout the lessons, connecting it to overall themes; by providing a variety of approaches to the lessons so that each aspect of the triple-heritage is presented; and by exploring relevant issues and concerns for African Americans.

Urban Ministries, Inc., Sunday School Lessons. Urban Ministries, Inc., (UMI) describes itself as The African American Christian Publishing and Communications Company. Its aim is to develop Sunday School lessons that integrate the African American experience, lifestyle, and heritage

with the Word of God. The purpose is to empower African Americans for successful Christian living.¹³ The UMI Sunday School Lessons are nondenominational and can be used in any church desiring to affirm the African American experience.

The UMI Sunday School Lessons are published quarterly by Urban Ministries, Inc. Like Echoes, the lessons are based on the International Sunday School Lessons.¹⁴ A sampling of materials from the fall quarter 1989, the spring quarter 1995 and the winter quarter 1995-96 was examined for this study.

UMI provides Sunday School materials for six age groups. They include the Preschool Playhouse for ages 2-5, the Primary Street for ages 6-8, the Juniorway for ages 9-12, Inteen for ages 13-17, Young Adult Today for ages 18-25 and Direction for ages 25 and over. Separate teachers' manuals, student guides and additional resources are available for each age level. Of particular interest is the Teaching Success Kit which provides a variety of teaching aids and Black history supplements to enrich each lesson.

The triple-heritage is present throughout the UMI

¹³ Urban Ministries Inc., "Empowering Your People With Sunday School Lessons," brochure (Chicago: Urban Ministries, Inc.), 1995-96.

¹⁴ Lessons are based on the International Sunday School Lessons: the International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching, copyrighted in 1992 by the Committee on the Uniform Series.

Sunday School Lessons. At each age level the lessons incorporate themes from the African American experience, biographical sketches of African and African American role models, historical background, contemporary issues for Blacks in Africa and America, poetry, sermons and music, including the spirituals from the African American tradition. As with the Faith Journey Series, however, all aspects of the triple-heritage are not presented in each of the lessons nor are they presented consistently from one quarter to the next.¹⁵

An example of how the triple-heritage is integrated in this material is illustrated in the youth study guide "Inteen" for the fall quarter of 1989. In Lesson Six of this material, the theme is "Good Overcomes Evil!," based on Daniel 7:13 and 21-27, which focus on Daniel's vision of God's actions towards the liberation of Judah. After the scripture reading, the lesson moves to a discussion of the

¹⁵ For example, in the adult materials for the fall 1989 quarter and the spring 1996 quarter, references to the African and African American heritage are minimal. These materials focus primarily on the Christian aspect of the triple-heritage. By contrast the adult materials for the winter 1995-96 quarter incorporate various resources from the African and African American heritage including poetry, historical background, biographical sketches, spirituals and issues confronting African Americans. See Philip L. Rodman, ed., "Direction: Bible Study Guide for Adults," Urban Ministries, Inc., Sept.-Nov. (Chicago: Urban Ministries, Inc., 1989); Bennie Goodwin, II., ed., "Direction: Bible Study Guide for Adults," Urban Ministries, Inc., March-May (Chicago: Urban Ministries, Inc., 1996); Bennie Goodwin, II., ed., "Young Adult Today," Urban Ministries, Inc., Dec.-Feb. (Chicago: Urban Ministries, Inc., 1995-96), see supplemental pages 1-64.

controversy surrounding slavery which ultimately culminated in the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves. The discussion features a poem by Frances Ellen Watkins, a free African American woman born in Baltimore in 1825 who frequently spoke out against slavery through her poems and essays. Then follows a presentation of the scripture that integrates the slaves' understanding of this passage as it is reflected through some of the spirituals about Daniel's prophecies. The lesson concludes with an affirmation of God's power to overcome evil, not only during the time of Daniel, but also during the time of slavery and in recent times as well. Discussion questions are presented at the end of the lesson to probe further the scriptures, the theme of sin and evil, and the hope of God's deliverance for people who are oppressed. Students are encouraged to write a spiritual that allows them to reflect on the meaning of this lesson for African Americans today.¹⁶

In this particular lesson, the Christian and African American aspects of the triple-heritage are featured. Both aspects are interwoven and related to one another in order to stimulate further discussion as well as deeper insight. Although the African component is not explicitly mentioned in this lesson, it is brought out in other lessons and can be seen throughout the various age levels. For example, the

¹⁶ Colleen Birchett, ed., "Inteen," Urban Ministries Inc., Sept.-Nov. (Chicago: Urban Ministries, Inc., 1989), 12-13.

Young Adult study guide for the winter 1995-96 quarter focuses extensively on the efforts of South Africans to overcome apartheid. These discussions are connected to the story of the exile and return of the people of Judah to their homeland, as presented in the book of Isaiah. Along with probing discussion questions, this resource provides a crossword puzzle on Africa, a bibliography for further reading on South Africa, writing exercises, personal application and other activities to stimulate further reflection and exploration.¹⁷

The UMI materials incorporate two basic approaches to the lessons. One approach begins with a contemporary or African American faith heritage story, then moves to a biblical story including reflection and application of the story, the reflection/application is followed by a craft or activity and ends with a worship time--often incorporating heritage personalities, posters and/or music (primarily for children) and emphasis on the spiritual message of the day. The children and young adults tend to follow this format. The second approach consists of a Bible study and an exploration of the text; a contemporary story and/or faith heritage moment that may include an African American spiritual, historical facts, a biographical sketch or poetry; reflection questions and a written activity. The

¹⁷ Goodwin, "Young Adult Today," Urban Ministries Inc., A-P.

youth and adults tend to follow the second format.

Numerous teaching methods and techniques--including storytelling, singing, dancing, arts and crafts, poetry, group discussion, worksheets, puzzles and writing activities--are incorporated. Although the content of the UMI materials emphasizes the three aspects of the triple-heritage, the process of education seems to shift the focus towards the Christian aspect. This is due to the fact that most of the questions and activities center around the meaning and application of the Bible. This is especially evident in the adult materials which tend to ask factual questions about the scriptures.

Although each component of the triple-heritage may not be present in every lesson, it is somewhat integrated throughout the materials. There is a conscious effort to incorporate all three aspects of the triple-heritage at each age level, both in the student and the teachers' materials. There is also valuable information that highlights both past and present experiences of African Americans. In the junior high and youth materials, poems and essays written by young people are featured along with biographical sketches of African American role models, historical facts, and lists of books by African American authors recommended for further reading.¹⁶ The theme of hope for freedom and liberation of

¹⁶ See Dolores C. Bell, ed., "Juniorway," Urban Ministries, Inc., Dec.-Feb. (Chicago: Urban Ministries, Inc., 1995-96); Birchett, "Inteen," Urban Ministries, Inc., Sept.-

all humanity also may be traced throughout the material.

Another strong point of the UMI materials is the continuity from one age level to the next. This is primarily due to the fact that all of the units focus on the same general themes and scriptures. Each lesson, however, is presented differently as appropriate for each age level. Another aspect that contributes to the continuity of the material is the supplementary pages that are included in all of the teachers' guides. All of the teachers' guides contain guidelines for developing each lesson and supplementary materials that include African American history, poetry, scripture commentaries, and other questions for reflection. Teachers can draw upon this material to enrich their lessons. This supplementary material would be particularly helpful for the preschool and primary lessons which do not present much dialogue about African American history. These books feature mostly pictures of African Americans and introduce songs such as the spirituals from the African American experience.

What is particularly interesting about the supplementary materials is that they are also the materials used for the adult study guides. The questions in the adult guides, however, shift from probing and reflective questions to factual and informational questions that tend to focus on the Christian aspect of the triple-heritage. Typical

Nov. 1989.

questions found in the adult study guide are: "Where were the disciples going? (Luke 24:13)" or "Who joined the disciples on the way? (Luke 24:15)."¹⁹

Although the UMI Sunday School Lessons could be strengthened by presenting all three aspects of the triple-heritage more fully and consistently throughout each quarter, the resource can be used effectively in a Christian education ministry that embraces the triple-heritage. Throughout this material, African Americans are presented in a positive light and the triple-heritage is affirmed and celebrated.

The National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Sunday School Materials. The National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., is one of the leading African American Baptist conventions in this country.²⁰ It produces and publishes its own curriculum resources through the Sunday School Publishing Board. These materials are designed specifically for Baptist churches.

The NBC Sunday School materials are published quarterly. They incorporate the King James Version and the New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible, the Uniform Lessons Outlines, and the Home Daily Bible Readings from the

¹⁹ Goodwin, "Direction," Urban Ministries Inc., March-May 1996, 41.

²⁰ For purposes of this dissertation, future reference to the organization are given as NBC.

International Sunday School Lessons Series.²¹ The materials examined in this study are from the winter quarter 1997.

The materials are divided into eight age levels. The student books include Nursery (ages 2-3), Kindergarten (ages 4-5), Primary (ages 6-8), Juniors (ages 9-11), Intermediate Youth Division (ages 12-14), Senior Youth Division (ages 15-18), Advanced--Older Youth and Young Adults (ages 18-34), and Adult Division (ages 36-over). There are two teacher's guides: one that contains teaching tips for ages 2-11 and another that contains all of the resources for the youth and adult divisions.²²

The triple-heritage is not fully present in these materials. The Christian aspect of the triple-heritage dominates with almost no evidence of the African or African American components. This is particularly true for the youth and adult division materials. For example, a typical lesson in both the youth and adult study guides may include the lesson topic, a devotional reading scripture, a

²¹ Patricia Williams, ed., "Children's Teacher," National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Jan-March (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1997), 1; Charles, G. Rowlett, "Baptist Teacher," National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Jan.-March (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1997), 1. Lessons are based on the International Sunday School Lessons Series, copyrighted in 1993 by the Committee on the Uniform Series.

²² See Williams, "Children's Teacher," National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Jan-March 1997; Rowlett, "Baptist Teacher," National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Jan-March 1997.

background scripture, the key verse, and the main passage of scripture. The lesson then moves to an introductory paragraph that introduces the scripture lesson and main focus for the day. After the introduction, an explanation is given of the biblical text. The lesson closes with a brief reflection on the meaning of the text for today, along with two or three questions for further discussion.

Unlike the UMI and the Faith Journey Series, the NBC teachers' guides do not offer any supplemental materials to stimulate discussion on African and African American themes. The guides primarily follow the same format as the student books, with additional teaching tips designed to expound upon the biblical text.

Although the triple-heritage is virtually absent from the youth and adult materials, there are glimpses of it in the children's materials. All of the children's books from ages 2-11 feature pictures of African Americans and biblical characters that portray African Americans in a positive light--as leaders, teachers, and contributors to society. The kindergarten and primary lessons incorporate a music/worship time. Some of the songs suggested for this time include selections from the Gospel Pearls hymnal.²³ The spiritual "Were You There" and other gospel songs such

²³ Williams, "Children's Teacher," National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., 23. See also National Baptist Convention of the United States of America, Sunday School Publishing Board-Music Department, Gospel Pearls (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1921).

as "Lord, I Want to Be a Christian" and "God Will Take Care of You" that are popular in the African American church are recommended. The nursery, kindergarten and primary materials feature biographical sketches of African American role models for each Sunday in February, in honor of Black History Month. Included are: Carter G. Woodson, an African American historian; Colin Powell, a U.S. Army General; Katherine L. Clinton, an electrical engineer; and L. Douglas Wilder, former governor of Virginia. The Kindergarten and Primary materials also feature a portrait of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in recognition of his birthday.²⁴

Like the Echoes materials, the NBC Sunday School materials follow a set format for each lesson, consisting of a Bible study, an explanation of the biblical text, a contemporary story or example to illuminate the text, and reflection questions designed to focus on the meaning and application of the text. Although all of the lessons follow the same basic format, they are adapted to meet the needs of

²⁴ Nina North Murphy, "Nursery Bible Lessons," National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Jan.-March (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1997), Lesson 5, Feb. 2, 1997, Lesson 6, Feb. 9, 1997, Lesson 7, Feb. 16, 1997, Lesson 8, Feb. 23, 1997; Bessie L. Ward, "Kindergarten Bible Lessons," National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Jan.- March (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1997), Lesson 3, Jan. 19, 1997, Lesson 5, Feb. 2, 1997, Lesson 6, Feb. 9, 1997, Lesson 7, Feb. 16, 1997, Lesson 8, Feb. 23, 1997; Katherine Saunders, "Primary Bible Lessons," National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Jan.-March (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1997), Lesson 3, Jan. 19, 1997; Lesson 5, Feb. 2, 1997; Lesson 6, Feb. 9, 1997; Lesson 7, Feb. 16, 1997; Lesson 8, Feb. 23 1997.

each age group. The materials focus primarily on the Christian aspect of the triple-heritage and do not allow each aspect of the triple-heritage to emerge fully.

While numerous teaching methods and techniques--such as storytelling, arts and crafts, puzzles, games, puppets and singing--are incorporated for the younger children, reflection questions, class discussions and written activities are the primary method used for the juniors, youth, young adults, and adults. For example, the activity study books for the juniors ages 9-11 and the intermediate youth ages 12-14, contain crossword puzzles, number games, worksheets, drawing activities and word searches.²⁵ The teaching methods and techniques also promote a dominant focus on the Christian heritage. This is due to the primary focus on Bible study and the minimal focus on African and African American heritage.

The NBC Sunday School materials would not be effective in a Christian education ministry that embraces the triple-heritage. Although the authors do draw upon some aspects of the triple-heritage, particularly for the younger ages, they do not go beyond the seasonal reflection of Black History Month or the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday in affirming

²⁵ See M. Joan Greig, "Activity Study Book for Intermediates: Youth Division Ages 12-14," National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., Jan.-March (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1997); Patricia Williams, "Junior Activity Study Book," National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Jan.-March (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1997).

and celebrating the triple-heritage. The resources also presuppose that juniors, youth and adults do not need to reflect on their triple-heritage. Furthermore, the series does not draw upon the rich resources that are inherent within the African American culture (e.g., music, dance, folklore, poetry, art, literature and historical accounts) to enrich the lessons and make the Christian faith relevant to the African American experience. A set format that is primarily Bible oriented is not conducive to a full presentation of the triple-heritage.

Although this material currently falls short of incorporating the triple-heritage, the publisher promises a new format for the second quarter of 1997. This new format is expected to broaden the section on the application of scripture to include a reflection on biblical principles and insights, along with contemporary issues and concerns as they relate to the African American experience.²⁶ An integrated and insightful discussion of all three aspects of the triple-heritage would help to strengthen this curriculum resource, particularly since the triple-heritage model promotes a reflection on the full heritage (African, African American and Christian) as opposed to a dominant focus on only one aspect of the heritage.

²⁶ Rowlett, "Baptist Teacher," National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., 4.

Comparative Analysis

Of the four curriculum resources examined in this study only the Faith Journey Series and the UMI Sunday School lessons are suitable for use in a Christian education ministry that embraces the triple-heritage. Both resources reflect the triple-heritage extensively throughout the various age levels. Although each component of the triple-heritage is not always present in each lesson, streams of the triple-heritage flow throughout the entire resource. Overall, they present a holistic view of the triple-heritage. Both resources also present positive and empowering images of Africans and African Americans. This is done not only through the pictures, but also through the discussions that portray people of African descent as capable and contributing members of society. Both curriculum resources have thoroughly integrated the triple-heritage, allowing each aspect to emerge fully. In other words, all three components are present and one component does not dominate while the others are left in the background. Finally, both have incorporated multiple approaches to the learning process that include music, dance, art, poetry and literature in order to explore creative expressions of faith in the African American tradition.

Although the Faith Journey Series and the UMI Sunday School Lessons have numerous similarities, they differ in

that the Faith Journey Series is a two year cycle that is completed at the end of that time period and the UMI Sunday School Lessons are based on the International Sunday School Lessons and are arranged in a six year cycle that is distributed quarterly. The UMI series offers a wealth of materials that can be used year after year whereas the Faith Journey Series offers limited resources. Despite the limitations of the Faith Journey Series, both can be used effectively as either the foundational curriculum resource in a church, or as supplementary materials to enrich lessons from other resources.

Since the triple-heritage is not fully represented in the Echoes Comprehensive Bible Study series nor the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Sunday School materials, neither one of these curriculum resources would support a Christian education ministry that embraces the triple-heritage. In both, the Christian component is dominant while the African and African American components are left on the periphery. Although some attempt has been made to adapt the Echoes series for African Americans, the NBC Sunday School materials have not made much visible effort to incorporate the African American experience. While some of the materials for the younger children in the NBC resources do reflect on African American role models during Black History Month and the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, the lessons for older children, youth and adults leave out such

presentations altogether. In the Echoes materials the opposite is true. The children's resources, as opposed to the youth and adult resources, have received minimal attention with respect to the African American experience.

Another shortcoming of the Echoes and NBC curricula is that they fail to integrate the triple-heritage and to probe deeply pertinent issues and concerns that affect African and African American people, such as racism and oppression. These resources focus primarily on the Christian heritage, illuminating the biblical text with little or no reflection on issues related to African and African American experience, culture and tradition. While the NBC materials do not address these issues at all, the Echoes series does at least mention some of them though only in a superficial way.

Finally, neither the Echoes series or the NBC materials draw upon the resources such as the spirituals, dance, poetry, drumming, folklore and so forth that help African Americans to affirm and celebrate their culture in light of their Christian faith. Both incorporate a set approach to the process of education that tends to focus primarily on the meaning and life application of the Bible. This approach does not facilitate a full reflection on the triple-heritage.

Implications for Christian Education
in the African American Church

Althou ~~gh~~ in the African American Church ~~ian~~ education from an African American perspective is just beginning to emerge, the work that is currently being done is promising. This growing body of research reflects a sensitivity to the history of Christian education for blacks in America, and researchers are seeking to address the contemporary needs of the African American church. From the historical analysis, at least two things are evident: the experience of African Americans has been devalued, and Christian education programs for African Americans have often lacked structure and organization. The congregational studies also reveal that although some African American churches have employed numerous strategies to enhance growth in their Sunday Schools, the triple-heritage is largely ignored in these churches. Likewise, the evaluation of curriculum resources indicates that while some Sunday School materials designed for African American churches reflect the triple-heritage, many fall short in this endeavor, even in terms of their own claims. Thus many African American churches do not incorporate educational resources that celebrate and affirm their African American heritage, even when they choose explicitly African American sources.

As the twenty-first century approaches, the African American church must continue to explore new models of

Christian education that will affirm and celebrate the uniqueness of the African American experience, nurture the Christian faith, develop quality educational programs, and promote social action within the African American community. Christian education that embraces the triple-heritage is just such a model. It holds true to the African proverb, "to go back to tradition is the first step forward." As African Americans build upon the wisdom of African and African American ancestors, they will be able to explore greater possibilities for Christian education in the African American church. Further research is needed in this area in order to develop new programs, to refine existing programs and to move the church towards a holistic ministry of Christian education.

Over the years, the African American church has played a significant role in the educational development of African American people. Through the efforts of the church, educational institutions were established so that African Americans could receive a formal education, enhance their skills and abilities, pursue their God-given freedom, achieve a significant level of success, and make a valuable contribution in all aspects of life and society. In order to build upon this foundation, the African American church needs to provide a viable ministry of Christian education that is relevant, liberating, affirming and life changing.

A creative and illuminating way to provide such an

education is through the use of the African American spirituals not only to teach the triple-heritage but also to guide the content and process of Christian education. Since the spirituals embody all three aspects of the triple-heritage they can be a lens through which to explore the three streams. Chapter 5 offers an analysis of the spirituals as a viable source for exploring the triple-heritage.

CHAPTER 5

The Spirituals

As we have seen, congregational life and curriculum resources designed for African American churches often do not embody the triple-heritage; thus, much room is left for development in this area. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the spirituals embody all three aspects of the triple-heritage and to explore their potential for guiding the content and process of education. This chapter will, thus, include explorations into the nature and character of the spirituals, the cultural and historical factors that have shaped them (thus revealing the triple-heritage) and the possibilities in spirituals for enhancing the educational ministry in the African American church.

Nature of the Spirituals

Although the exact date of origin for the spirituals has never been pinpointed, many believe they first began to emerge around 1750-1775.¹ Just as it is difficult to cite a specific date of origin for the spirituals, it is also

¹ Mark P. Bangert, "Black Gospel and Spirituals: A Primer," Currents in Theology and Mission 16, no. 3 (1989): 174; William Farley Smith, "Cries of Freedom in Afro-American Spirituals: Music/Worship Aids for Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration and Black History Recognition," Drew Gateway 61, no. 1 (1991): 60-71; Wyatt Walker, 40; Lovell, 63; John W. Work ed., American Negro Songs and Spirituals (New York: Bonanza Books, 1940), 1. For other perspectives on the origin of the spirituals see also Fisher, Negro Slave Songs; Southern, Music of Black Americans; Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals, Epstein, "A White Origin for the Black Spirituals?"; and Shaw, Black Popular Music in America.

difficult to provide a single definition of these songs. Thus, they have been described in a variety of ways. One of the leading African American intellectuals of the nineteenth century, W. E. B. DuBois referred to the spirituals as "sorrow songs."² In his writings, he stated that they "are the articulate message of the slave to the world." He added "they are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering, and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways."³

Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile,
 Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile,
 Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile,
 A long ways from home, A long ways from home.⁴

Despite the overwhelming despair, DuBois recognized the beauty of the spirituals which ultimately affirm a strong conviction that life would one day be transformed. He concluded, "through all the sorrow of the sorrow songs there breathes a hope--a faith in the ultimate justice of things."⁵

Then I get down on my knees an' pray,

² William Edward Burghardt DuBois, "Of the Sorrow Songs," in The Negro in Music and Art, ed. Lindsay Patterson, International Library of Negro Life and History (1902; reprint, New York: Publishers Company, 1967), 9.

³ DuBois, "Of the Sorrow Songs," 10.

⁴ "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Chile," in Songs of Zion, 83.

⁵ DuBois, "Of the Sorrow Songs," 13.

Get down on my knees an' pray.⁶

Zora Neale Hurston, on the other hand, an African American female anthropologist and prolific writer from 1920-1950, offered another view. Rejecting DuBois' idea that all of the spirituals are sorrow songs, she maintained that they encompass a variety of subjects "from a peeve at gossips to Death and Judgment."⁷ "The real spirituals," according to Hurston, "are not really just songs," but rather "they are unceasing variations around a theme."⁸ The spirituals, then, explore various themes from a number of perspectives. Thus they can be shaped or reshaped depending upon the situation or circumstances of the people creating the song.

Hurston also argued that the spirituals are always in the process of creation; they are meant to be sung with a group rather than as a solo. She explained that a genuine presentation of the spirituals is not possible because most of them have been altered by composers and arrangers. She referred to these spirituals as "Neo-Spirituals."⁹ Hurston claimed, regarding the spirituals, that "the nearest thing

⁶ "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Chile," in Songs of Zion, 83.

⁷ Zora Neal Hurston, "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," in The Negro in Music and Art, ed. Lindsay Patterson, International Library of Negro Life and History (1933; reprint, New York: Publishers Company, 1967), 15.

⁸ Hurston, 15.

⁹ Hurston, 15.

to a description one can reach is that they are Negro religious songs, sung by a group, and a group bent on expression of feelings and not on sound effects."¹⁰ Thus for Hurston, the spirituals are the songs of the people emerging out of their unique experience of oppression and sung by them. Hurston understood the spirituals more broadly than Dubois as communal religious songs of feeling.

Adding another dimension to this discussion, Maud Cuney Hare, an African American female, writer, lecturer and concert pianist during the early twentieth century, suggested that the spirituals are

the expression of a supreme belief in immortality that transcends mere religious creeds and theoretical dogma. Through them the paganism of African "spirit" songs is reborn and modified by Christian doctrines, and they are the musical expression of spiritual emotion created by the race and not for it.¹¹

Like DuBois and Hurston, Hare emphasizes the depth of emotion and feeling that emerges from these songs as well as their communal nature. Hare builds upon DuBois and Hurston by reaching back to African origins as the foundation of these songs but she adds that they are also influenced by Christian doctrines.

In a similar fashion, Arthur C. Jones emphasizes African origins in his definition of the spirituals, giving

¹⁰ Hurston, 15.

¹¹ Hare, 21.

particular attention to the ring shout celebration, an African dance custom that continued during slavery.¹² Like Hare, Jones recognizes the influence of the Bible and he also points out that the heavy emphasis in these songs is on the biblical stories from the Old Testament. The influence of the Old Testament can be seen in the spiritual "Ezek'el Saw de Wheel," based on Ezekiel 1:4-28.

Ezek'el saw de wheel
 'Way up in de middle o' de air,
 Ezek'el saw de wheel
 'Way in de middle o' de air.
 De big wheel run by faith,
 De little wheel run by de Grace 'o God,
 A wheel in a wheel
 'Way in de middle o' de air.¹³

In The Spirituals and the Blues, James Cone refers to the spirituals as "the power of song in the struggle for black survival."¹⁴ He maintains that the spirituals illustrate "the essence of black religion."¹⁵ According to Cone, the spirituals are "historical songs" that reveal the struggle for freedom, survival and identity within the slave community. They not only illuminate the struggle, but they are also a "joyful experience, a vibrant affirmation of life and its possibilities. . . ."¹⁶ Cone thus adds a dynamic

¹² Arthur Jones, 6. See page 330 of this dissertation for a description of this custom.

¹³ "Ezek'el Saw de Wheel," in Songs of Zion, 84.

¹⁴ Cone, Spirituals and the Blues, 1.

¹⁵ Cone, Spirituals and the Blues, 29.

¹⁶ Cone, Spirituals and the Blues, 29-31.

dimension to his definition of the spirituals an emphasis on the spirituals as a cultural expression that is essential for the identity and survival of African Americans. They not only provide insight into the daily challenges of the slaves' existence, but they are also a joyful and empowering experience. While Cone does not reject DuBois' characterization of the spirituals as "sorrow songs" which speak of death and suffering, he builds upon that description by also affirming Hurston's view of multiple themes and by suggesting that the spirituals also celebrate life and all that it has to offer.¹⁷

The spirituals then, may be defined from several perspectives. Emerging out of the brutal institution of slavery, Christian influences and African culture, they incorporated a wide variety of themes. Resistance to the demands of slavery, the identity of the slaves with the children of Israel, the pain and sorrow of daily existence within the system of slavery, the hope for freedom, the supernatural power of God, the unique bond with Jesus of Nazareth, the longing for a closer walk with God, the war

¹⁷ The spirituals have also been described by others with terms like slave songs, jubilees, Negro Spirituals, folk songs, work songs, shuffles, ring spirituals, shout spirituals, ring shouts, shout songs, minstrel songs, slave melodies, running spirituals, and religious songs. See Mark P. Bangert, "Black Gospel and Spirituals," 174; J. Jefferson Cleveland with William B. McClain, "A Historical Account of the Negro Spiritual," in Songs of Zion (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 73; Wright, 1.

against sin and evil, the reality of Satan, the slaveowners deceit and hypocrisy, hope for the future, love, grace, justice, mercy, judgment, death and eternal life--all are encompassed in the wide spectrum of issues that arose out of the unique experience of African American slaves.¹⁸

But they also embody a style of singing (group, communal) and a depth of emotion. As DuBois concludes, the spirituals are the creation of a people "weary at heart." Negro Spirituals are the "music of an unhappy people," and yet he affirms that even in the midst of despair, they are "the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side [of] the seas."¹⁹

Characteristics

As these several definitions show, the spirituals are a complex phenomenon and no one definition has given a fully satisfying insight into them. While the previous descriptions shed light on the spirituals, they provide only a partial view of these songs. In an effort to broaden these definitions, Wyatt T. Walker in Somebody's Calling My Name outlines several characteristics that he believes are fundamental traits of the spirituals.

1. Deep Biblicism - Many spirituals are heavily

¹⁸ Wright, 1-2; Lovell, 215-16, 223, 240; Cleveland and McClain, 73; William Farley Smith, "Cries of Freedom in Afro-American Spirituals," 60; Henry Hugh Proctor, "The Theology of the Songs of the Southern Slave," Journal of Black Sacred Music 2, no. 1 (1988): 52.

¹⁹ DuBois, "Of the Sorrow Songs," 9-10.

influenced by the Bible, especially by Old Testament imagery. Spirituals that do not have a specific biblical reference often tend to have biblical overtones and/or implications. In some spirituals specific biblical stories and/or scripture references can easily be identified.²⁰ For example, the story of the victorious battle of the Israelite army, led by Joshua against the city of Jericho (Josh. 6:1-27) is the theme of the spiritual "Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho."

Joshua fit de battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho;
Joshua fit de battle of Jericho, an' de walls came
tumblin' down.²¹

2. Eternality of Message - Although the spirituals were created long ago, the message of many of these songs is universal. In other words the message of numerous spirituals has transcended time and continues to speak to the human condition even today.²² The spiritual entitled "God is a God," illustrates the universal nature of God.

God is a God! God don't never change!
God is God An' He always will be God!²³

3. Rhythm - One of the strongest characteristics of the spirituals is rhythm. This aspect of the spirituals illustrates a strong link to Africa, where rhythm is a major

²⁰ Wyatt Walker, 52-54.

²¹ "Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho," in Songs of Zion, 96.

²² Wyatt Walker, 54.

²³ "God Is a God," in Songs of Zion, 140.

part of the music. The spirituals are not bound to one particular rhythm because the rhythm may vary within a particular song or from song to song. The rhythm of a spiritual may be "slow and plaintive," "driving and pulsating," rigorous and jubilant.²⁴ An example of a spiritual that can be sung either with a slow and contemplative rhythm or an upbeat and lively rhythm is "This Little Light of Mine."

This little light of mine, I'm goin' to let it
shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.²⁵

4. Improvisation - Because the spirituals are flexible and spontaneous, they can be easily improvised to correspond with a variety of events or situations. This is usually done by changing the words to fit a particular occasion.²⁶ The spiritual entitled "Don' Let Nobody Turn You Aroun'," was adapted and used during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. An earlier version of the song ran as follows:

Don' let nobody turn you aroun', Turn you roun',
turn you roun'.
Don' let nobody turn you roun' Walking up the
King's Highway.

²⁴ Wyatt Walker, 54.

²⁵ "This Little Light of Mine," in Songs of Zion, 132; See also Lovell, 287-88. While it is difficult to pinpoint the origin of the spirituals, Lovell believes that this spiritual is based on the scripture that states, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). According to Lovell, the slaves were inspired to let their light shine even in the midst of darkness.

²⁶ Wyatt Walker, 55.

During the Civil Rights Movement it became:

Don' let segregation turn you aroun' . . .²⁷

5. Antiphony or Call and Response - Since this characteristic is commonly seen in African music, its presence in the spirituals is "strong evidence of an African survival in the New World."²⁸ It usually begins with a chant, sung by a leader or soloist, that is followed by the group or congregation. This characteristic also illustrates the communal nature of the spirituals. The spiritual "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," is as an example.

Leader: Swing low, sweet chariot,
 Response: Coming for to carry me home:
 Leader: Swing low, sweet chariot,
 Response: Coming for to carry me home."²⁹

6. Double or Coded Meaning - Some spirituals possessed a dual or hidden meaning which allowed the slaves to communicate secret messages with one another, without being detected by their masters. As described earlier, this feature can also be traced back to the African practices of masking with symbols and double meanings.³⁰ Through their

²⁷ Wyatt Walker, 55. For more information on the adaptation of the spirituals during the Civil Rights Movement, see Lincoln and Mamiya, The Black Church in the American Experience, 368-71; William Farley Smith, "Cries of Freedom in Afro-American Spirituals," 60-71; Spencer, "Freedom Songs of the Civil Rights Movement," 1-16.

²⁸ Wyatt Walker, 55.

²⁹ "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," in Songs of Zion, 104.

³⁰ Wyatt Walker, 56-59. For additional information on coded or dual messages see also Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness, 7-10; Lovell, Black Song, 7, 40, 42, 45-

songs Africans often related words of insult, history, wisdom and humor with more than one meaning. While the spiritual "Steal Away" announced a secret meeting or an impending escape, the spiritual "Go Down Moses" reflected the slaves' strong identification with the oppression of the children of Israel and communicated their belief in a God who identified with their suffering and would one day liberate them.

When Israel was in Egypt's land: Let my people go;
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, Let my
people go.
Go down, Moses, 'Way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole Pharaoh, Let my people go.³¹

7. Repetition - Many spirituals repeat the melody, lyrics or both with minimal changes throughout the song. Repetition, also considered a result of the strong influence of African music, helped to facilitate the memory of words and the longevity of these songs.³² The spiritual entitled "Were You There?" illustrates this characteristic.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble,
tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?³³

8. Unique Imagery - Many spirituals create tremendous

46.

³¹ "Go Down, Moses," in Songs of Zion, 112.

³² Wyatt Walker, 57-58.

³³ "Were You There?" in Songs of Zion, 126.

imagery.³⁴ The images created by these songs are often so powerful that one can actually visualize or feel the images portrayed. This unique quality can be seen in the spiritual "Hush, Hush, Somebody's Callin' Mah Name."

Hush. Hush. Somebody's callin' mah name.
 Hush. Hush. Somebody's callin' mah name,
 Oh mah Lawd, Oh mah Lawdie, what shall I do?
 Sounds like Jesus. Somebody's callin' mah name.
 Sounds like Jesus. Somebody's callin' mah name,
 Oh mah Lawd, Oh mah Lawdie, what shall I do?
 Soon one mornin' death'll come creepin' in mah
 room,
 Soon one mornin' death'll come creepin' in mah
 room.
 Oh mah Lawd, Oh mah Lawdie, what shall I
 do?³⁵

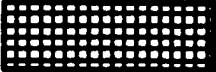
Walker's contribution suggests that the spirituals embody various themes and styles arising from particular cultural influences. He illustrates this point in the following chart which provides a general comparison of the basic characteristics of African music and the slave spirituals.³⁶

³⁴ Wyatt Walker, 58.

³⁵ "Hush, Hush, Somebody's Callin' Mah Name," in Songs of Zion, 100.

³⁶ Comparison Chart from Wyatt Tee Walker, "Somebody's Calling My Name": Black Sacred Music and Social Change (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1979), 53. Used with permission of Judson Press.

COMPARISON CHART

AFRICAN MUSIC	AFRO-AMERICAN SPIRITUALS
Rhythm	Rhythms
	
Polyrhythm	Cross Rhythms
	
Polyphony	Harmony
	
Recurring Lines	Fixed Refrains
	
Spontaneous Creations	Improvisation
	
Syncopation	Beat
	
Pentatonic	Pentatonic
	
Antiphony	Call & Response
	

Taken with other definitions, then, the spirituals could be defined as the form of music arising from the unique convergence of African culture, slave experience and Christian religion. In other words, the spirituals embody the triple-heritage.

Historical Background

To reinforce this point it will be helpful to analyze more carefully the African, African American and Christian influences that shaped the spirituals. This analysis is divided into three sections: African roots, the development of the spirituals in the United States and slave religion. These sections correspond with African, African American, and Christian influences on the spirituals.

African Roots

Two major aspects of African roots that have influenced the spirituals--the African world view and music in the African tradition are examined in this section.

African World View. The Africans who came to America as slaves arrived in the New World deeply rooted in a rich heritage, a dynamic world view and the wisdom of their ancestors. African American culture was thus significantly shaped by the African culture that was brought to this country and passed on to subsequent generations.³⁷ This process took place, according to Paris, as Africans from numerous tribal backgrounds arrived in this country and

³⁷ Hale, 193; Paris, Spirituality of African Peoples, 34.

began to incorporate various aspects of the new world into their cosmology.³⁸ These cosmologies "found expression in the spirituals, music, dance and the general life-style of later generations who came to be known as Afro-Americans."³⁹

The African world view that shaped the life, understanding and cultural expression of the slaves emphasized the connectedness of living things. Thus Barrett asserts:

The universe is a vast system consisting of God, the supreme power who created it, spirits and powers who rule over every aspect of this creation and, at the center, man. All things below man, all lower biological life was created for man, and the inanimate things serve him also.⁴⁰

This sense of connectedness is grounded in the strong sense of community which is foundational to the African world view. According to Ogbonnaya, "communality, relationality, and fundamental interconnectedness" are vital to the African understanding of "seeing and being in the world" and "conscious cooperation in the community" is held in highest esteem.⁴¹ He goes on to illustrate the unifying nature of the African world view by stating that

the African conception of communality,

³⁸ Paris, Spirituality of African Peoples, 34-35.

³⁹ Barrett, "African Religions," 314.

⁴⁰ Barrett, "African Religions," 313.

⁴¹ Ogbonnaya, On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation, 1.

particularly as manifested among the Igbos of West Africa, consists of a spiritual unity that binds people together, thus creating a communal bond that is unbreakable by distance or death.⁴²

Since all are connected for the African, therefore, all aspects of life are highly valued and considered sacred. Africans accordingly strive to live life to the fullest by respecting the harmonious balance between God, humanity and nature. These elements, according to Levine, are "distinct but inseparable aspects of a sacred whole."⁴³ Paris affirms this notion by observing that

in traditional African thought all reality (human and natural, animate and inanimate) was thought to be derived from a common, primeval divine source on which its continuing existence depended. Hence they viewed everything as sacred in some respect and saw nothing as totally profane.⁴⁴

The connectedness and sacredness of all things leads, in turn, to an affirmation of life which compels Africans to participate fully in the whole of life. This aspect of the African world view can be seen in African music, dance, folklore, storytelling and proverbs. Through these modes of expression Africans share their beliefs and feelings, rehearse their history, critique the establishment, set forth their world view, observe rituals and ceremonies, communicate with others within the community and provide

⁴² Ogbonnaya, On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation, 4.

⁴³ Levine, 32.

⁴⁴ Paris, Spirituality of African Peoples, 33-34.

guidelines for instruction.⁴⁵ Barrett notes, in particular, the role of African folktales and proverbs in establishing moral codes:

In them we find instructions for the preservation of life, leading a moral life, living cautiously, loving God, and holding respect for the aged, as well as the wisdom of gratitude and the beauty of temperance. We may conclude, then, that the world view of Africa is above all life affirming.⁴⁶

Thus, an African world view embodies a sense of connectedness, unity, sacredness and life.

Aylward Shorter points out that African traditional religion,⁴⁷ which grows out of this world view, is concerned with the success of the community. For instance, Africans place great emphasis on community cooperation and meaningful interpersonal interactions within the community are vital. For Africans, the nature of community includes both "the freedom of the individual within the community, and the responsibility of the individual for the community."⁴⁸ Finally, according to Shorter, Africans

⁴⁵ Lovell, 37-42.

⁴⁶ Barrett, "African Religions," 314

⁴⁷ African traditional religion refers to "the indigenous religion of the Africans." This religion, according to J. Omosade Awolalu, is still a vital part of African culture particularly since it has been passed on from one generation to the next and Africans continue to embrace this religion in their daily living. See J. Omosade Awolalu, "Sin and Its Removal in African Traditional Religion," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 44, no. 2 (1976): 275.

⁴⁸ Aylward Shorter, African Christian Theology: Adaptations or Incarnation? (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), 35.

respect the relationship between human and spiritual beings, particularly since their conception of community includes the living, the dead and often the unborn.⁴⁹ Of course, African Traditional Religion is more complex than merely a concern for community.⁵⁰ Margaret Creel adds that it includes a belief in the Supreme Deity; belief in the afterlife; respect for the ancestors; and belief in the "supernatural causation of suffering, disease, accidents [and] death," to which "magic and medicine were employed."⁵¹

For many Africans who were brought to the new world, religion was the central aspect of their being. As Jessie Mulira states:

Religion was (and remains) a vital part of the lives of most Africans. For some it encompassed their entire existence. It substantiated and explained their place in the universe, their culture, and their relationship to nature and humankind; it also dictated their roles in the community and society at large. Religion among most African ethnic groups was not simply a faith or worship system; it was a way of life, a system of social control, a provider of medicine, and an

⁴⁹ Shorter, 36. See also Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy; Ogbonnaya, On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation.

⁵⁰ See pages 44-46 for additional discussion on the African understanding of God.

⁵¹ Margaret Washington Creel, "A Peculiar People": Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs, American Social Experience Series, no. 7 (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 52-58.

organizing mechanism.⁵²

Thus, religion was held in high esteem by many Africans for it was an integral part of their total being and it permeated every aspect of their lives. It is not surprising then that slave music was intensely religious.

Music in the African Tradition. In Africa, music is a vital part of the customs and practices of the people. In fact almost every aspect of African life is accompanied by music. For example, music is used when the African is "born, named, initiated into manhood, warriored, armed, housed, betrothed, wedded, [and] buried."⁵³ Music is also used in work, play, leisure and artistic expression. In essence, music permeates every aspect of human life and its expression brings about fellowship, unity and celebration.

Instruments, dancing and singing are all important in African music. Although the drum is generally the instrument of choice, other instruments such as rattles, calabashes--gourds filled with shells, beans or stones, xylophonelike marimbas, trumpets of horn, wood, or reed, stringed instruments and flutes are also used.⁵⁴ Dance is

⁵² Jessie Gaston Mulira, "The Case of Voodoo in New Orleans," in Africanism in American Culture, ed. Joseph E. Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 37.

⁵³ Lovell, 37.

⁵⁴ Fisher, 2-5; Southern, 8-14; Franklin, 25. See also Lovell, Black Song, 41, who includes hand-clapping as a form of instrument commonly used in Africa and closely associated with the spirituals.

a mode of education and creative expression, and singing, whether chanting or normal singing, is communal and universal.⁵⁵

African songs are often spontaneous, "full of emphatic gusto," antiphonal, often improvised, free, celebrative, unmeasured, rhythmic and responsorial. Other characteristics include: call and response, recurrent incremental lines, repetition, short phrases, syncopation and various themes reflecting on life, the universe, nature and politics.⁵⁶ As Lovell observes, "all these characteristics, unique to or emphatic in Africa, appear over and over in the spiritual."⁵⁷

African Influence on the Spirituals. Although Africans and African Americans have been separated by many years and many miles, evidence of their common heritage can still be seen in their religious expression. Paris notes that the strongest connection between the African and African American religious expression is their common belief in a Supreme Being, who is the creator and sustainer of the universe and is not limited to time and space. Since the cosmos, in the mind of Africans, is considered sacred, everything reflects "the sacred nature of the cosmos"

⁵⁵ Lovell, 39-40.

⁵⁶ Lovell, 37-43. Many more elements characterize African music, however, only a few, particularly those that are also present in the spirituals are listed here.

⁵⁷ Lovell, 41.

including the whole of their cultural expression."⁵⁸ Paris agrees with Levine who writes: "For the slaves, then, songs of God and the mythic heroes of their religion were not confined to a specific time or place, but were appropriate to almost every situation."⁵⁹ This orientation was vital, according to Paris, because it "enabled African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora to live in the presence of their gods and to view all things as ordered or disordered by the latter's will."⁶⁰ The spirituals reflect various other aspects of the African world view and Traditional African religious beliefs as well. For example, the sacred nature of reality, the belief in a Supreme Being and the holistic integration of all aspects of the world can be seen in the spiritual "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands."

He's got the whole world in His hands,
He's got the big, round world in His hands,
He's got the whole world in His hands,
He's got the whole world in His hands.⁶¹

The verses go on to acknowledge that God has the wind and the rain, the sun and the moon, the little bitty baby, brothers and sisters and everybody in His hands. Although not much is known about the origin of this song, some believe that it was a praise song for God, the Creator and

⁵⁸ Paris, Spirituality of African Peoples, 34.

⁵⁹ Levine, 31.

⁶⁰ Paris, Spirituality of African Peoples, 34.

⁶¹ "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," in Songs of Zion, 85.

Sustainer of the universe, that emerged through the oral tradition and expressed the slaves belief that God's power undergirds and directs all of life regardless of the situation.⁶² The slaves believed that the whole world was guided and controlled by a Supreme Being--God. Since God was in control, they knew that God was concerned about every aspect of the world. God was also personal and held every person in God's hands. Thus, in God all people were embraced as sisters and brothers surrounded by God's love. Therefore the slaves had faith that God would ultimately overcome their peculiar situation. God was in control, not the forces of oppression. This faith gave them the ability to survive under the brutality of slavery. Many other spirituals also incorporated this notion of the sacredness and value of all aspects of the world.

The African influence can also be seen in the creative way that the African slaves drew upon their understanding of the world to develop not only a new community and a new religion, but also an elaborate system of survival, protection, power and control based on the African practice of coding. This was often done in an open forum where Africans had the freedom to express their feelings about each other and their leaders through music, dance, metaphor

⁶² McClain, 92; Christa K. Dixon, Negro Spirituals: From Bible to Folk Song (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 110-11.

and other modes of artistic expression.⁶³ In an effort to exercise some sense of power and control within their situation, the slaves incorporated coded messages in many of the spirituals in order to "conceal their business from the overseers and the plantation owners."⁶⁴ Sometimes these messages announced a secret meeting: "Walk together, children, Don't you get weary, There's a great camp-meeting in the Promised Land."⁶⁵ Others may have signaled an impending escape: "Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus! Steal away, steal away home, I ain't got long to stay here!"⁶⁶ Still others were used to mock their masters and to expose their religious hypocrisy: "Heav'n, heav'n, Ev'rybody talkin' 'bout heav'n ain't goin' there, Heav'n, heav'n, Goin' to shout all over God's heav'n."⁶⁷ Thus the practice of coding can be seen in numerous spirituals.

Another aspect of African heritage that is reflected in the spirituals is the high regard for religion. During the time of slavery, many slaves continued to value religion very highly, as the following spiritual illustrates:

O walk Jordan long road,
And religion so sweet;

⁶³ Levine, 7-10.

⁶⁴ Wyatt Walker, 58.

⁶⁵ "There's a Great Camp Meeting," in Songs of Zion, 156.

⁶⁶ "Steal Away," in Songs of Zion, 134.

⁶⁷ "I've Got a Robe," in Songs of Zion, 82. For a variation on the title and words see also Dixon, 104.

O religion is good for anything,
 And religion so sweet.
 Religion make you happy.
 Religion gib me patience.
 O member, get religion.
 I long time been a-huntin'.
 I seekin' for my fortune.
 O I gwine to meet my Savior.
 Gwine to tell him 'bout my trials. . . ."

Just as religion was a vital part of the life and existence of most Africans, many slaves continued to embrace religion as a "way of life, a system of social control, a provider of medicine, and an organizing mechanism."

But more than just African themes can be seen in the spirituals, the unique characteristics of African music are reflected as well. Just as music is an integral part of the customs and practices of African people, accompanying all aspects of life, so it was pervasive in the slave community too, (a point that will be elaborated below).

Characteristics such as repetition and call and response are present in both African music and in the spirituals. James Weldon Johnson notes that the structure of the spirituals is often identical to that of African music. For example, both incorporate the recurrent incremental leading lines with a choral response. Drawing upon Denham and Clapperton's Narrative of Travels in Northern and Central Africa, Johnson cites the following song by the people of Bornou.

" See William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware and Lucy McKim Garrison, Slave Songs of the United States (1867; reprint, New York: Peter Smith, 1929), 13.

" Mulira, 37.

Give flesh to the hyenas at daybreak--
 Oh, the broad spears!
 The spear of the Sultan is the broadest--
 Oh, the broad spears!
 I behold thee now, I desire to see none other--
 Oh, the broad spears! . . . ⁷⁰

Another African song illustrating the same characteristics is taken from a Bantu folktale entitled The Story of Tangalimlibo.

It is crying, it is crying,
 Sihamba Ngenyanga.
 The child of the walker by moonlight,
 Sihamba Ngenyanga.
 It was done intentionally by people, whose names
 cannot be mentioned
 Sihamba Ngenyanga.
 They sent her for water during the day,
 Sihamba Ngenyanga. . . . ⁷¹

When these African songs are compared to the African American spiritual, Oh Wasn't Dat a Wide Ribber, the similarities are striking.

Oh, de Ribber of Jordan is deep and wide,
 One mo' ribber to cross.
 I don't know how to get on de other side,
 One mo' ribber to cross.
 Oh, you got Jesus, hold him fast,
 One mo' ribber to cross.
 Oh, better love was nebber told,
 One mo' ribber to cross. . . . ⁷²

Finally, the communal nature of African music is also reflected by the use of music in the slave community. As in Africa, music was primarily sung in and for the community.

⁷⁰ James Weldon Johnson, ed., The Book of American Negro Spirituals (New York: Viking Press, 1925), 23-24.

⁷¹ Johnson, 24.

⁷² Johnson, 25.

Lovell notes that since music in Africa was "chiefly a community enterprise, the creation of the new community in America was a perfect cradle for the musical transfer."⁷³ Thus, the spirituals emerged through this new community, which nurtured a unique environment for critical, reflective and creative expression. He comments further that "in the broad sense, the folk community which produced the spirituals still exists; in more narrow senses, it has undergone a number of changes, and some very great changes. The fact that the spiritual is still alive and working in the broad community is one proof of its relevancy."⁷⁴

As African slaves began to adjust to life in the new world, they embraced a number of beliefs and practices that allowed them to survive under the brutal system of chattel slavery. Although the Africans who found themselves in the bonds of slavery incorporated a variety of beliefs and customs in order to bring some semblance of meaning and order to their lives, according to Levine "it was in the spirituals that slaves found a medium which resembled in many crucial ways the cosmology they had brought with them from Africa and afforded them the possibility of both adapting to and transcending their situation."⁷⁵

The spirituals therefore reflect the African heritage.

⁷³ Lovell, 64.

⁷⁴ Lovell, 221.

⁷⁵ Levine, 19.

It can be seen in the world view of the spirituals, their use of coded messages, their high regard for religion, and the nature and use of their music.

Development in the United States

As noted above, though the spirituals first appeared sometime after 1750, no organized effort to collect them was made until after the Civil War when in 1864 Charlotte Forten and in 1867 Thomas Wentworth Higginson recorded some of the songs that they had heard. In 1867 William F. Allen, Charles P. Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison were the first to formally compile a substantive collection of the spirituals.⁷⁶

The popularity of the spirituals increased in 1871 when the Fisk University Jubilee Singers began presenting the spirituals in concert in the United States and abroad. Other black institutions and individual artists also began to arrange, compose and feature the spirituals in their own performances. Although the spirituals were shaped and reshaped over the years, and no longer resembled the original form that they embodied during slavery, they continued to evoke a sense of passion and hope whenever they were performed. The spirituals served as a source of

⁷⁶ Sterling A. Brown, "The Spirituals," in The Book of Negro Folklore, eds. Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1958), 279.

inspiration for many societies throughout the world.”

Before their more general popularity, of course, the spirituals had played a vital role in the life of the slaves and particularly in their religious life. The testimonies of fugitive and freed slaves indicate that the slaves placed great value on their private worship services. These services were held in the slave quarters or in secluded areas, known as "hush harbors" or "bush arbors," some distance away from the plantation; they became known as the "invisible institution."

Although the slaves often worshipped in the presence of their masters, they preferred to have their own private services so that they could worship as they pleased, free from the dictates of their masters.” While some slaves were granted permission, and even encouraged, to attend religious services, usually conducted by white preachers, many were not permitted to attend any type of gatherings. They risked harsh punishment and even death if they were caught attending services of any kind. Their determination to worship in their own way prevailed, however, and even in the midst of danger they found a way to attend these secret services.”

” Wyatt Walker, 62-63; Sterling Brown, 279-80; Southern, 225-28; Shaw, 1-4.

” Raboteau, 212-13, 225-26; Wyatt Walker, 30-32.

” Raboteau, 213-15, 19-20.

The spirituals were shaped in the invisible institution. For one thing, as noted above, they were part of the elaborate system developed to keep the meetings secret. Messages encoded in them could communicate the time and place of the next meeting. Another interesting aspect of the slaves' system of secrecy was the use of an iron or kettle pot, turned upside down in the middle of the group to catch the sound during their secret worship services. As an ex-slave reflects, "all the noise would go into that kettle; they could shout and sing all they wanted to and the noise wouldn't go outside."⁴⁰ As Raboteau points out, it is difficult to determine whether these pots operated symbolically or played a practical role in reducing the sound. This would be interesting to know, especially since these secret services were lively and festive celebrations which usually consisted of prayer, praise, singing, dancing, shouting, preaching and fellowship.⁴¹ Sidney Mintz does suggest, however, that the use of the pots by the slaves may have been "a remnant of African custom," which could have emerged symbolically as a replacement for the drums, which were prohibited by the slave master.⁴²

The spirituals were an integral part of these worship services. The slaves spontaneously created these songs

⁴⁰ Quoted in Levine, 42.

⁴¹ Raboteau, 216-18; Levine, 42.

⁴² See Raboteau, 216.

during the services, where they served as praise songs that expressed their love, adoration and confidence in God, prayers that voiced their cares and concerns, and educational tools that taught worshippers about God, Jesus, sin, Satan and living the Christian life.

The spirituals were not only a vital part of the invisible institution, but they also served an important function in the work environment of the slaves. Most of the slaves in the United States lived on southern plantations in the early years of the nineteenth century. These plantations produced large quantities of cotton and rice.³³ Slaves, whether house slaves or field hands, were expected to put in long hours of back-breaking work, with a minimal amount of food and rest. In order to keep up with this pace, the slaves often sang as they worked using music just as it had been used in Africa.³⁴ Music was thus a central part of their daily work routine, which involved "picking cotton, threshing rice, stripping tobacco, harvesting sugar cane, or doing the endless small jobs on the plantation, such as clearing away underbrush or repairing fences."³⁵ As one ex-slave reflected, "we would pick cotton and sing, pick and sing all day."³⁶

³³ Southern, 149.

³⁴ Levine, 6.

³⁵ Southern, 153.

³⁶ Quoted in Levine, 6.

Many spirituals originated in this setting. Of the many classes of work songs three in particular seem to emerge most often: some songs were used for work where no "rhythmic movement" was involved. In this case a recurring line may have been repeated as the slaves completed their work.⁸⁷ The song "John Henry" based on the legendary hero who was believed to be the greatest "steel drivin' man" illustrates this theme.

This ol' hammer killed John Henry! This ol' hammer
killed John Henry! This ol' hammer killed John
Henry, But this ol' hammer won't kill me!"

Another class of work songs are those that contain work themes, often reflecting the dynamics among the workers, their work, and their overseers. The song "Captain, O Captain" reflects both the life in the work camp and the workers' interaction with the "boss."⁸⁸

Captain, O captain, you must be cross,
It's six o'clock an' you won't "knock-off!"
Captain, O captain you must be blin'
You keep hollerin' "hurry" an' I'm darn nigh
flyin'.⁸⁹

Finally, rhythmic songs were used for work involving

⁸⁷ Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson, The Negro and His Songs: A Study of Typical Negro Songs in the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1925), 247.

⁸⁸ "John Henry," in American Negro Songs and Spirituals, ed. John W. Work (New York: Bonanza Books, 1940), 233.

⁸⁹ Odum and Johnson, 248, 252.

⁹⁰ "Captain, O Captain," in American Negro Songs and Spirituals, 237. See also Odum and Johnson for additional verses, 252-53.

systematic or uniform movement by the workers and were often used to set and keep the pace of the work.⁹¹ The song "Raise the Iron," originating in the communal work environment, illustrates the ability of the leader and the workers to "pull together" in a cooperative effort to complete their work.⁹²

Brother Rabbit, Brother Bear, Can't you line them
just a hair?
Shake the iron, um-uh! Down the railroad, um-uh!
Well, raise the iron, um-uh! Raise the iron, um-uh!
Well, is you got it, um-uh! Well, raise the iron,
um-uh!
Raise the iron, um-uh! Throw the iron, um-uh!
Throw the iron--throw it away!"

The spirituals also provided a means of expressing the hope and despair that arose out of the living conditions under the brutal system of chattel slavery. Slaves were considered property and bought and sold at the whim of the white slaveholders. Under this system families were torn apart, women were raped and children were forced to work at an early age. Slaves who were unable to complete their assigned duties for the day were often subjected to brutal

⁹¹ Odum and Johnson, 246-48. For more information on work songs see also John W. Work, American Negro Songs and Spirituals, 38-39; Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals, 161-83; Southern, The Music of Black Americans, 177-82.

⁹² Odum and Johnson point out that this particular song illustrates how the foreman of a gang often raises a question regarding the work, and this is followed by the response of the leader which "sets the standard" for the gang to "pull together" to complete the specific task. See Odum and Johnson, 262-63.

⁹³ See Odum and Johnson, 262.

punishment. Since slaves had no rights, slave masters were rarely prosecuted if a slave was killed in the course of his or her punishment."⁴ The slaves sang about the anguish and despair that was often a part of their daily existence: "Nobody knows the trouble I see, Nobody knows my sorrow; Nobody knows the trouble I see, Glory, hallelujah!"⁵ In the midst of such hardships, the spirituals emerged as a source of strength, support, encouragement, survival, hope and freedom.

As in Africa, so also in America, music thus served an important function. In Africa, music permeated all aspects of life including work, play, leisure and religious observances. On a deeper level, music

served the dual purpose of not only preserving communal values and solidarity but also providing occasions for the individual to transcend, at least symbolically, the inevitable restrictions of his environment and his society by permitting him to express deeply held feelings which ordinarily could not be verbalized."⁶

In a similar fashion, slave music in America not only enhanced the religious services and set the pace for work, but it also gave the slaves the ability to endure the pressures of their laborious tasks. Music was a means of expressing criticism, inner feelings, unvoiced desires and

⁴ Southern, 151-52; Webber, 37.

⁵ "Nobody Knows the Trouble I See," in Songs of Zion, 170.

⁶ Levine, 7-8.

aspirations. It was also the accompaniment to a wide range of activities; slaves sang during free time, religious services, ring shout celebrations, slave auctions, holidays and festive occasions, as entertainment for the planters, and to send coded messages to warn the slaves of the patrolmen ("patty-rollers") who were enlisted to enforce the "Black Codes" (a patrol system established to break unlawful gatherings of the slaves)."

The importance of the spirituals for African Americans did not end with the abolition of slavery. They continue to influence American culture even today. For instance, the spirituals have significantly affected the development of other types of music including the "minstrel songs, jazz, blues, country music, popular songs, ring-game songs, swing, White rock, 'soul' music, and gospel music."" They have not only touched the world of music, but they have also influenced other forms of artistic expression such as dance, drama, literature and art."

The spirituals themselves have been resurrected in recent times in the Civil Rights Movement. For example, the spiritual, "Woke Up This Morning with My Mind on Jesus" changed to "Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on

" Southern, 153-71.

" Cleveland and McClain, 78.

" Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson, The Teachings: Drawn from African-American Spirituals (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992); Walker, 63.

Freedom" and "This Little Light of Mine" was adapted to "This Little Light of Freedom."¹⁰⁰ During the height of this movement the freedom songs served as a vital source of community pride, inspiration, purpose, solidarity, unity, encouragement and support.¹⁰¹

Slave Religion

The spirituals not only reflect African and African American heritage, but they also reflect Christian heritage, particularly as it emerges through slave religion (the religious beliefs and practices of the slaves).

In Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death, Howard Thurman suggests that the spirituals reflect slave religion in that they draw upon three main sources: the Bible, nature and the slaves' religious experience. According to Thurman, the stories and images drawn from the Bible appear to favor the Old Testament. Because the slaves were able to identify with the plight of the Hebrew children, they immediately internalized their story of bondage and liberation. Spirituals like "Go Down Moses" and "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel" are two examples

¹⁰⁰ Lincoln and Mamiya, The Black Church in the African American Experience, 369-71; William Farley Smith, "Cries of Freedom in Afro-American Spirituals," 60-71; Spencer, "Freedom Songs of the Civil Rights Movement," 1-16.

¹⁰¹ William Farley Smith, "Cries of Freedom in Afro-American Spirituals," 60-71; Spencer, "Freedom Songs of the Civil Rights Movement," 1-16.

of spirituals that were drawn from the Old Testament.¹⁰²

But the New Testament also served as a rich resource for the spirituals which reflect substantial interest in the life and death of Jesus Christ. The majority of spirituals drawing from the New Testament indicate that the slaves identified more personally with the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus than with his birth,¹⁰³ since they felt that he truly understood their situation. Thus, the slaves were able to interweave their own experience of suffering with the story of the crucifixion.¹⁰⁴ The spiritual "He Nevuh Said a Mumbalin' Word," illustrates:

They crucified my Lord,
An' He nevuh said a mumbalin' word,
They crucified my Lord,
An' He nevuh said a mumbalin' word,
Not a word, not a word, not a word.¹⁰⁵

Other spirituals such as "Were You There?" and "Calvary," also reflect on the suffering of Jesus.

The slaves, however, did not see Jesus as one who was defeated. Rather, in the resurrection they saw him as a Conquering King and Liberator and they firmly believed that he would one day deliver them from the bonds of slavery.

He's King of Kings, and Lord of Lords,
Jesus Christ, the first and last,

¹⁰² Thurman, 12-15.

¹⁰³ Thurman, 15-24.

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, 40.

¹⁰⁵ "He Nevuh Said a Mumbalin' Word," in Songs of Zion, 101.

No man works like him.
 He built a platform in the air,
 No man works like him.
 He meets the saints from everywhere,
 No man works like him.
 He pitched a tent on Canaan's ground.
 No man works like him.
 And broke the Roman Kingdom down,
 No man works like him.¹⁰⁶

The birth theme does appear occasionally, however, as in "Go, Tell it on the Mountain."¹⁰⁷

Go, tell it on the mountain,
 Over the hills and everywhere,
 Go, tell it on the mountain
 That Jesus Christ is born.¹⁰⁸

While the chorus of this song appears to be inspired by the biblical story of the birth of Jesus, Dixon argues that it is not clear that the original verses delineated the Christmas story at all. If such originals were in fact created, they have since vanished.¹⁰⁹ Dixon argues that the Christmas verses in recent church hymnals, have been created by songwriters who wish to connect Christmas themes throughout the song.¹¹⁰ Other spirituals containing birth

¹⁰⁶ See Thurman, Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks, 19-24.

¹⁰⁷ Thurman, 15-19.

¹⁰⁸ "Go, Tell It on the Mountain," in Songs of Zion, 75.

¹⁰⁹ Dixon, 55.

¹¹⁰ Dixon, 57-58. It is important to note that this spiritual has more than one set of verses. One set contains non-Christmas themes as in the following verse, "When I was a sinner, I prayed both night and day; I asked the Lord to help me, And he showed me the way," See Dixon, 55; and Thurman, 17. By contrast another set of verses centers around the Christmas story, "While shepherds kept their watching, O'er silent

themes include, "Mary Had a Baby," "Sister Mary Had-a But One Child," "Three Wise Men to Jerusalem Came," and "Lit'l Boy How Old are You?"

In addition to the Bible, the ideas that emerged out of the world of nature also provided a wealth of material for the spirituals. The songs that were influenced by this source were usually very simple and drew comparisons between various aspects of nature and the slaves' existence. For instance, the slaves' identification with an "inch worm" can be seen in the spiritual "Keep A-Inchin' Along."

Keep a inchin' along,
 Massa Jesus comin' by an' by,
 Keep a inchin' along like a po' inch worm,
 Massa Jesus comin' by an' by.¹¹¹

The spirituals were also influenced by the religious experiences of the slaves. This source served as a means of religious expression through which the slaves revealed the victories and challenges of their faith journey. Inspired by the words of the psalmist "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so," Psalms 107:2, the slaves testified about their

flocks by night, Behold throughout the heavens, There shone a holy light." See Dixon, 58; and "Go, Tell It on the Mountain," in Songs of Zion, 75. It is possible that both sets of verses were created after the time of slavery. "Go Tell It on the Mountain" was also adapted and used during the Civil Rights Movement. For examples of these adaptations see Dixon, 59-60 and Lovell, 535.

¹¹¹ See Thurman, Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks, 25. In Thurman's view the slaves were not concerned about the meaning or the significance of these comparisons. They were simply expressing the analogies that emerged as they observed the world of nature.

faith in the spiritual "Certainly Lord."¹¹²

Have you got good religion?
 Cert'nly Lord! . . .
 Have you been redeemed?
 Cert'nly Lord! . . .
 Have you been to the water?
 Cert'nly Lord! . . .
 Have you been baptized?
 Cert'nly Lord! . . .
 Cert'nly, Cert'nly, Cert'nly Lord!¹¹³

The slaves' wanted to live a life that reflected their faithfulness to God, especially in light of the religious hypocrisy of the slaveholders. This longing for faithfulness inspired them to sing,

Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart, . . .
 Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart, . . .
 Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart, . . .
 Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart, . . .¹¹⁴

The religious experience of the slaves served not only as a means of religious expression, but also as a vehicle for the slaves to express their inner emotions and deepest desires. Since the slaves saw themselves as children of God and understood that they were created by God to be free, they often expressed their desire for freedom through the spirituals. Thurman indicates that "freedom from slavery and freedom from life were often synonymous."¹¹⁵ Many

¹¹² McClain, 120.

¹¹³ "Certainly Lord," in Songs of Zion, 161.

¹¹⁴ "Lord, I Want to Be a Christian," in Songs of Zion, 76-77.

¹¹⁵ Thurman, 29.

times the desire for freedom through death became the dominant focus; however, this desire did not mean that all of the slaves had accepted the constraints of slavery. The tone of many spirituals indicates that some of the slaves were determined to resist.¹¹⁶ This spirit of resistance is expressed in several lines of the spiritual "Oh, Freedom"

An' befo' I'd be a slave,
I'll be buried in my grave,
An' go home to my Lord an' be free.¹¹⁷

This spiritual, emerging prior to the Civil War and emancipation, was born out of the desire to be free from slavery and oppression.

Drawing from stories of the Bible, the slaves' physical surroundings, and their own personal religious experiences in the slave quarters and "hush harbors," the spirituals were thus fashioned as a unique means of providing hope, personal expression, and survival in the midst of pressures imposed by the brutal institution of slavery.

This discussion has shown that the spirituals have been shaped by African, African American and Christian influences. Since the spirituals are rooted in all of these traditions, they thus can be embraced as embodiments of the triple-heritage.

¹¹⁶ Thurman, 25-30.

¹¹⁷ "Oh, Freedom!" in Songs of Zion, 102.

**The Spirituals as a Source for Enhancing the Educational
Ministry in the African American Church**

Given that the spirituals embody the triple-heritage, we now must consider whether and how they might be used as a guide for the content and process of education. To do this we must first determine whether the use of the spirituals can be an effective method of Christian education within the African American church.

In his article "An African American Method of Religious Education," Joseph Crockett identifies three assumptions that undergird effective methods of Christian education from an African American perspective. First, the African American experience must be the context out of which the methods arise. Second, the methods should be adaptable. While addressing the specific concerns of the African American community, these methods should also lend themselves to persons from other cultures, who may also gain insights from these methods for application in their particular context. Third, African American Christian educators must play an active role in designing educational programs that will address the needs of the African American community.¹¹⁸

The use of the spirituals could be an effective method of Christian education according to Crockett's criteria.

¹¹⁸ Joseph V. Crockett, "An African American Method of Religious Education," 52-53.

Concerning his first point, they are an integral part of the African American culture because they were born out of the African American experience of slavery and they include a holistic view of African American Christian heritage which embraces African roots, African American history, and the Christian faith. Since the spirituals embody all three aspects of this heritage they can be an effective way to explore the heritage and to guide a process of education that is communal, open-ended, tradition bearing, changing, future-directed, emotive, praxis oriented, creative, and critical.

The spirituals are also adaptable. The previous discussion on the characteristics of the spirituals indicates that they are given to improvisation, which means that they can be shaped and reshaped to accommodate a particular situation or event. This would suggest that Christian education is improvisational; it is a creative process which is not limited by people, environment or circumstances.

Use of the spirituals can further address Crockett's adaptability criteria in that they possess a universal message that continues to speak even today. Although the spirituals were created many years ago, they continue to influence not only the African American community but the wider community as well. This suggests a triple-heritage model of Christian education that speaks inside the African

American community and beyond. People within the African American community can continue to draw from the wisdom of the spirituals, while people from other cultures can experience the spirituals both as a source of inspiration and also as a vehicle for exploring the African American heritage. The spirituals can also serve as a source of motivation for persons to explore their own heritage, by helping them identify specific elements within their culture that have special meaning, just as the spirituals have significant meaning within the African American community. The spirituals may ultimately be a way to gain insight into other cultures (possibly through dialogue or sharing stories, music and art), and to dispel misleading stereotypes that often hinder one's appreciation and understanding of other cultures.

Moreover, since the spirituals are easily accessible to African American Christian educators through audio and video recording, hymnals and song books, educators can fully examine the spirituals by listening to and exploring the background of these songs. This examination can assist educators in exploring the possibilities for a holistic approach to Christian education as suggested by the spirituals and developing an educational program that addresses the needs of the African American community.

It is important to note that the spirituals can easily be incorporated into the Christian education curricula.

Since an effective Christian education ministry will undergird all aspects of the church's ministry, the spirituals are a particularly good resource; they can be used not only for inspirational purposes, but to educate church members through the choir, Sunday School, prayer meetings, auxiliary/board meetings, outreach programs, worship services, special events and virtually all other areas of the church's ministry. In each setting, the spirituals can be used to raise cultural awareness and appreciation by focusing the congregations attention on the three streams of the triple-heritage. As a result they will build self-esteem by sharing the legacy of African and African American foreparents, enhance spiritual growth by drawing insights from the faith journey of the slaves, stimulate critical reflection on social concerns by analyzing and critiquing systems of oppression, and motivate active participation within the community by examining the cooperative efforts of the slave community to promote education, unity, protection and liberation.

In this chapter, then, we have seen that the spirituals both embody the triple-heritage and may be helpful in developing a model of Christian education that embraces the triple-heritage. This latter point will be explored more fully in chapter 6 as we consider how theology and Christian education are related and, accordingly, how the spirituals as embodiments of African American theology inevitably point

the way to new educational programs. Chapter 7 will focus more specifically on a new model of education for African Americans.

CHAPTER 6
Theology and Christian Education
in the African American Church

Chapter 5 examined the spirituals and showed them to be a viable source for teaching the triple-heritage and guiding Christian education in the African American church. Since the spirituals were created by a people deeply moved by the Spirit of God, this chapter will examine the theology that emerges from the spirituals. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to explore the relationship between theology and Christian education in the African American church and to draw implications from the theological insights embodied in the spirituals for an African American model of Christian education that centers around the triple-heritage.

This chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section examines the relationship between Christian education and two contemporary theologies--Black theology and Womanist theology; it then draws implications for Christian education in the African American church. The second section analyzes the slaves' theological understanding as revealed through the spirituals. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the spirituals as exemplars and as sources for deeper insights into the theology and function of the spirituals in the African American church. The third section reflects critically upon the theological insights of the spirituals for an African

American model of Christian education that centers around the triple-heritage.

Black Theology, Womanist Theology
and Christian Education

There is essential agreement among scholars that an intimate relationship exists between theology and Christian education, though this relationship may be approached from a variety of perspectives. One of the most persuasive discussions of this relationship has been provided by Paul Nichols who identifies several important insights from three religious educators.¹ For example, Randolph Crump Miller maintained that theology undergirds curriculum and serves as a vehicle through which learners can develop a "right relationship with God."² Moving beyond curriculum to an analysis of the teaching process within the church, Howard Grimes argued that theology intersects with Christian education in three basic ways: it identifies the content, it aids the church in determining the teaching process and it stimulates educational questions regarding methodology.³ The relationship between Christian education and theology is

¹ Nichols, 190.

² Randolph C. Miller, The Clue to Christian Education (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 6, 15, cited in Nichols, 190.

³ Howard Grimes, "Theological Foundations for Christian Education," in An Introduction to Christian Education, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 32-33, cited in Nichols, 190.

further illuminated by C. Ellis Nelson who links theology and curriculum to the meaning making process. For Nelson, "curriculum is an organized effort to provide meaning for the church's theology in terms that can be readily understood."⁴

Jack Seymour and Donald Miller broaden this discussion by placing education and theology in dialogue. Through this dialogue they advocate a "fundamental understanding" of education "that sees teaching as a theological activity." This activity enhances one's relationship with God, provides understanding in light of this relationship and empowers people to communicate their faith actively. To theologize is thus to participate in the educational process since theology is "reflection by the people of God within the community of faith, seeking to understand and respond to what it means to be accepted, sent, and called by God into the brokenness of the world."⁵

Christian education and theology are thus closely related; or, to put it more pointedly, Christian education is theological education. It follows, then, that as the church explores new theologies it is simultaneously

⁴ C. Ellis Nelson, "The Curriculum of Christian Education," in An Introduction to Christian Education, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 160, cited in Nichols, 190.

⁵ Jack Seymour and Donald E. Miller, "Openings to God: Education and Theology in Dialogue," in Theological Approaches to Christian Education, eds. Jack Seymour and Donald E. Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 23-24.

envisioning new programs of education. Since as Nichols points out, theology and Christian education are interrelated, it is essential that they both be "relevant to the experience of the learner." He goes on to suggest that Black theology, then, should be the primary focus for African Americans.⁶ While I agree with Nichols, I would build upon his conclusion by suggesting that the African American church should embrace not only Black theology but Womanist theology as well. Since the African American church does not typically consider the unique relationship between theology and Christian education, it is important to gain an understanding of these two contemporary theologies. Both seek to address the experience of African Americans, and how they both can inform and enhance Christian education in the African American church. Advocates of Black and Womanist theologies, along with their explorations of Black experience, have also reflected on the role of education in the church. Some of their ideas and implications for Christian education will be presented in what follows.

Black Theology

The Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1960s provided the fertile climate for Black theology to emerged. Although the Civil Rights movement, according to Cone, was instrumental in affirming the liberating power of the gospel for African Americans, it was not successful in freeing

⁶ Nichols, 190.

Christianity from the dominant white European American values and images of God that permeated both Black and White churches.⁷ Since many African American churches embraced the beliefs and practices of white denominations, their theological distinctiveness was lost amidst white theologies. These theologies, as Cone observes, were particularly problematic for African Americans because they were overly rational, abstract and insensitive to the concrete issues and concerns of African American people.⁸ Disillusioned by the African American church, proponents of the Black Power Movement, among others, criticized the church claiming that it was complacent, powerless and irrelevant for African American people. They further challenged the African American church to reflect seriously on what it means to be a Black Christian in America.⁹

Black theology has responded to these criticisms. It has launched a radical critique of white racism and the inadequacy of white theologies to address the needs of African American people. Since the experience of African

⁷ James H. Cone, Black Theology and Black Power 20th Anniversary ed. (1969; reprint, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), vii. See also Evans, We Have Been Believers, 3-4; James H. Evans, Jr., "Black Theology," in A New Handbook of Christian Theology, eds. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 69-70; Wilmore, 192, 210-19.

⁸ Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, vii, 32-33; Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 4-5, 18-19.

⁹ Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, vii-ix; Evans, We Have Been Believer, 3-5; Wilmore, 218.

Americans is distinctively different from that of European Americans, Black theology reflects on the Christian faith through the lens of poor, oppressed and exploited African American people and illustrates the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ to their liberation from white oppression. Black theologians agree that the gospel message empowers African Americans to fight for dignity, equality and social, economic and political justice.¹⁰

Black theology has also called attention to the need for accountability between the African American church and the African American community. It challenges the church to become actively involved in the life of the community and to engage in concrete action towards liberation. For Cone, this means proclaiming a message of hope and freedom that is relevant and consistent with the real issues and concerns of African American people.¹¹

Perhaps most importantly, Black theology has encouraged positive African American identity and self-esteem. This has been done not only by embracing African American history and celebrating African American culture, literature, experience and modes of worship, but by also affirming that God is concerned about the oppressed and actively involved in the struggle for liberation. Cone asserts that God's

¹⁰ Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, 35, 37-47; Evans, We Have Been Believers, 2-6; J. Deotis Roberts, Black Theology in Dialogue (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 18.

¹¹ Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 129-35.

identification with the oppressed Blacks of America, through the incarnate Christ, affirms that liberation is a continuation of God's work and makes God's mission and ministry relevant for African Americans today.¹² By raising African American cultural consciousness and restoring confidence in the liberating work of Jesus Christ, Black theology has attempted to instill a greater sense of appreciation for African American heritage and pride in one's African American personhood.

What is significant for our purposes is that Black theology has reinterpreted or re-visioned theology through the lens of African American experience in an effort to affirm that experience, as well as the relevance of the Christian gospel for African Americans today. This reinterpretation of theology was clearly articulated in the following statement adopted by the National Committee of Black Churchmen in 1969.

Black theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of "blackness." It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. . . . The message of liberation is the revelation of God as revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Freedom IS the

¹² Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 63-64, 121; James H. Cone, God of the Oppressed (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1975), 120, 135-37.

gospel. Jesus is the Liberator!¹³

Cone also affirms this reinterpretation of theology in his description of Black theology when he asserts that

Black Theology is that theology which arises out of the need to articulate the significance of Black presence in a hostile white world. It is Black people reflecting religiously on the Black experience, attempting to redefine the relevance of the Christian Gospel for their lives.¹⁴

Although some may argue that Black theology is not Christian theology because it focuses heavily on the African American experience, Cone insists that the central focus on the African American "predicament" as the starting point of theological reflection, especially in light of God's revelation through Christ, is what makes Black theology Christian theology.¹⁵ Illuminating Cone's discussion, Willard Williams asserts that the "concept of Black theology is not an opposing view in the understanding of the Christian faith," but rather it "appropriates the gospel to

¹³ "Black Theology," statement by the National Committee of Black Churchmen, 13 June 1969, in Black Theology: A Documentary History, vol. 1: 1966-1979 eds. James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 38, adopted at the annual convocation in Oakland, California.

¹⁴ James H. Cone, "Black Consciousness and the Black Church: A Historical-Theological Interpretation," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 387 (Jan. 1970), quoted in Grant S. Shockley, "Liberation Theology, Black Theology, and Religious Education," in Foundations for Christian Education in an Era of Change, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 85.

¹⁵ Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, 118; Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 5.

the black experience or life situation."¹⁶ Thus, Black theology is Christian theology that embraces the experience of African American people and empowers them to move towards liberation.

While Black theology embraces a wide-range of theological concerns and perspectives, some of the central claims, as articulated by James Cone, are briefly mentioned below. He asserts that God is on the side of the oppressed. This understanding of God is significant because it reflects God's identification with the oppressed and active involvement in the struggle towards liberation.¹⁷ He emphasizes this point by focusing on Jesus Christ in his historical context, which reveals that he was poor, oppressed, despised and persecuted. The resurrection of Christ is also significant because it illustrates God's liberating power over the forces of oppression. Furthermore, Jesus is not just a person who lived in the past, but he is the Christ who participates with the oppressed in bringing about liberation today. Cone's emphasis upon the blackness of Christ, although symbolic, draws attention to the plight of African Americans and the "concreteness of Jesus' continued presence" and liberating

¹⁶ Willard A. Williams, Educational Ministries with Blacks (Nashville: Board of Discipleship, United Methodist Church, 1974), 7.

¹⁷ Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, 43-47; Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 55-81; Cone, God of the Oppressed.

work in the world today.¹⁸

Black theology also affirms African American personhood in the quest for freedom. African Americans should celebrate their blackness and embrace freedom as their God given inheritance. Cone maintains that the church can facilitate the journey by proclaiming divine liberation; by actively participating in the struggle for liberation; and by embodying the gospel of freedom.¹⁹

Finally, Black theology draws upon a variety of sources including: Black experience, which reflects not only upon the experience of oppression but upon African American self-determination and affirmation; Black history, which acknowledges not only a heritage of bondage, but the movement of God towards liberation; Black culture, which includes music, dance, art, poetry, literature and other forms of cultural expression; revelation, which combines God's revelation with the struggle for liberation; scripture, which affirms Black theology as biblical theology and emphasizes the biblical message of human liberation; and tradition, which embraces the liberative aspects of Christianity in the struggle towards African American liberation²⁰.

Black theology thus arises out of the particular

¹⁸ Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 119-24.

¹⁹ Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 130-32.

²⁰ Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 23-35.

experience of African American people and seeks to make meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ in light of that experience.

Black Theology and Christian Education

Black theology has far reaching implications for education in African American churches. It can aid the church in shaping meaningful and relevant educational programs for African Americans. In the following discussion, the relationship between Black theology and Christian education will be examined.

In order to address the needs of the African American community, Christian education and Black theology must engage in a transformative interaction to bring about change in the African American church and community. In light of this interaction, the task of Christian education is twofold: it helps to build faith within the congregation and it empowers the faith community to participate in the struggle against "injustice" and "indifference."²¹ On the other hand, the task of Black theology is to inform the educational activities that will equip the congregation to bring about change. Black theology further challenges African American Christians to engage in personal and communal reflection. Such critical reflection can help to instill a sense of self-worth that will mobilize African Americans to fight for liberation in all areas of their

²¹ James Harris, "Christian Education," 15.

lives.²²

James Harris deepens this analysis by suggesting that Black theology serves as a paradigm to help persons understand the need and the process for bringing about liberation. Liberation can take place as African American churches develop programs that affirm African American heritage, teach skills for achieving freedom, liberation and self-esteem, promote social change, examine curriculum materials for aspects of racism and discrimination, and develop afrocentric materials that are liberating and life affirming. In short, the educational ministry of the church can be instrumental in effectuating transformation, liberation and social change.²³

An example of a church that is striving towards liberation and social change is the Monumental Baptist Church of Pittsburgh. This church operates a Home Mission Institute, designed to address inadequate housing, joblessness, illiteracy and poverty. In order to address these concerns effectively, the pastor and various church members are participating in the decision making policies within the city through their active involvement on various committees and boards. The pastor has also encouraged the clergy and laity within the community to come together to address the social, political and economic concerns of

²² James Harris, "Christian Education," 15.

²³ James Harris, "Christian Education," 15-18.

African Americans in the city. According to Harris, Monumental Baptist Church reflects an "optimistic" and progressive Christian education program that emphasizes social change.²⁴

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem is another example of an African American church involved in the struggle to bring about social and political change. A commitment to social and political change can be seen in Canaan Baptist Church's active involvement in the Civil Rights movement during the 1960s. Since that time, the pastor, Wyatt Tee Walker, has continued to influence American society through his scholarship and preaching ministry. In recent years, the church has developed and implemented numerous programs such as a Senior Citizens Service Center and Federal Credit Union that have advanced the struggle for liberation.²⁵ Thus, Black theology and Christian education can play a vital role in the struggle for liberation within the African American church and community. Together they move the church beyond a classroom oriented Christian education ministry to an educational ministry that emphasizes active participation in the community.

Black theology encourages the church not only to bring about change through active participation in the community,

²⁴ James Harris, "Christian Education," 16.

²⁵ James Harris, "Christian Education," 16-17.

but it also challenges the church to engage in the process of liberation for those who are oppressed. This can be done by developing a curriculum that centers around the African American experience and affirms freedom, personhood and hope. This curriculum can empower African Americans to fight for liberation with immediate practical application in the area of civil rights.

Grant Shockley offers insights into a Christian education program that centers around the unique African American experience. He contends that such a program must include a theoretical and operational educational model that emphasizes liberation for the oppressed. The central aim of this model is to empower the powerless to participate in the struggle towards liberation. An African American centered Christian education program must also include a cognitive model of learning that lifts up the Christian faith as an authentic expression of faith for those who are oppressed. This model of learning draws upon various sources including the bible, history, and the Christian tradition. Christian education from an African American perspective must provide a holistic model of learning, which emphasizes the "organic or 'whole' nature of existence rather than the compartmentalization of life."²⁶ A holistic model of learning is an inclusive model that celebrates diversity. A

²⁶ Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 16.

Christian education program for African Americans embraces a model of socialization that affirms the uniqueness of other cultures. This model of socialization encourages open dialogue, free from prejudice and stereotypes among persons from various backgrounds. Finally, African American Christian education must incorporate a model of leadership that nurtures the gifts and talents of pastors, teachers and various church leaders. An effective model of leadership can empower African Americans to transform their society.²⁷

Shockley's discussion is helpful in that it provides a frame of reference from which to begin critical theoretical reflection for a Christian education program that is informed by Black theology and centers around the unique experience of African Americans. His theory of application may be expanded by including practical steps for designing such a program.

Christian education from an African American perspective requires close attention to the unique relationship between Black theology and Christian education. It is essential that the two work hand in hand to assist African Americans in developing a meaningful relationship with God, to equip African Americans to address the holistic needs within their communities, to instill a sense of self-worth and pride in their rich cultural heritage and to

²⁷ Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," 16-17. See also Shockley, "Liberation Theology, Black Theology, and Religious Education," 86-87.

empower African Americans to bring about liberation and social change.

Womanist Theology

Although Black theology embraces the experience of African American people, it often lacks sensitivity to the particular experience of African American women. Womanist theology specifically addresses these concerns. One of the hallmarks of womanism is that it affirms Black women's experience, culture and contributions while critiquing their three-fold oppression of racism, sexism and classism. Womanism encourages a constructive, theological and ethical reflection that moves black women towards liberation.²⁸

During the 1980s many African American female clergy and religious scholars embraced the term womanist as a way of naming themselves, celebrating their culture and heritage, affirming their experience and acknowledging their historical contributions to society and religious discourse. This was a significant move, according to Karen Baker-Fletcher, because women have traditionally been left out of theological reflections on humanity; and Black women "have been excluded most of all." Using the contextual experiences of Black women, womanist theologians are constructing "concepts of human nature that are inclusive of

²⁸ Cheryl J. Sanders, "Afrocentric and Womanist Approaches to Theological Education," in Living the Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology, ed. Cheryl J. Sanders (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 158.

Black womanhood."²⁹

What is most interesting to note is the impact of Alice Walker's definition of womanist on African American female theologians and, particularly, how it has served as a springboard for African American women not only to define themselves but also to be heard on their own issues, to initiate change, and to love themselves and others to the fullest extent. According to Walker, "womanist" comes from "womanish," a term used in the African American community to denote a young woman who is exhibiting "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior."³⁰ Such a young woman also portrays a sense of power, determination, boldness and liberation. This aspect of Walker's definition reveals a sense of confidence and assertiveness that African

²⁹ Karen Baker-Fletcher, "Womanist Theology and Ethics," workshop held during the Annual Convocation for Ministers and Laypersons, Claremont School of Theology, 1 Nov. 1993.

³⁰ Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi-xii. The term "womanish" emerged out of black folk culture and has been passed from mother to daughter. It usually refers to a sassy girl who thinks that she is "grown." While this is the primary definition of "womanist" for Walker, she also lifts up other key elements that help to shape the definition. These elements include: (1) a "black feminist" or "a feminist of color," (2) "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually," (3) a woman who "appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility . . . and women's strength," (4) "loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually," (5) "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female," (6) "not a separatist, except periodically, for health," (7) traditionally a universalist and capable, (8) loves music, dance, the moon, the Spirit, love, food, roundness, struggle, the Folk and herself regardless! and (9) "womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender."

American women have always possessed but have not been allowed to exercise, due to the three-fold oppression of racism, classism and gender discrimination that continues to plague African American women even today. Thus the term womanist has come to symbolize the experience of African American women.

Through their writings, womanist theologians and ethicists have raised numerous issues that beacon attention from the African American church and community, from African American males, from the academy and from "white" feminist theologians. Some of these issues include: the discomfort of African American women with white "feminist" and/or "women's liberation," emphasizing the fact that African American women's issues and concerns have not readily been addressed by white women;³¹ the exclusion of the African American female experience in the church, the community and the academy and how this omission is oppressive, racist, sexist and devalues the contribution of African American women;³² the absence of the lesbian voice in Christian

³¹ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "Womanist Ways of Seeing," in Black Theology: A Documentary History, vol. 2: 1980-1992, eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 321-24.

³² Katie Cannon, "Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: The Womanist Dilemma in the Development of Black Liberation Ethics," in Black Theology: A Documentary History, vol. 2: 1980-1992, eds. James Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 300-08.

womanist dialogue;³³ and the role of the Christian church and community in the oppression of African American women.³⁴

In addressing these issues, Womanist theology draws upon numerous sources, including African American women's experience, culture, and literature (e.g. autobiographies, folktales, poetry, essays and other forms of expression). These reflect African American women's heritage, traditional practices and contributions. Regarding the method incorporated by Womanist theology, Cheryl Sanders offers a helpful threefold model that includes a reflection on Black women's quest for survival throughout history, a critique of the three-fold oppression of Black women (racism, sexism, classism), and the construction of a theology and ethic that embrace the experience of Black women. This process engages a "liberative praxis" that actively seeks to overcome oppression and injustice.³⁵ In short, Womanist theology acknowledges the significant role that history and culture play in the development of one's theology.

³³ Renee Hill, "Who Are We for Each Other?: Sexism, Sexuality and Womanist Theology," in Black Theology: A Documentary History, vol. 2: 1980-1992, eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 345-51.

³⁴ Frances E. Wood, "Take My Yoke Upon You," in A Troubling in My Soul, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 37-47.

³⁵ Sanders, "Afrocentric and Womanist Approaches to Theological Education," 158.

Womanist theology includes reflection on God, Jesus, the church and the Bible through the lens of African American women's experiences. Like Black theology, Womanist theology affirms that God is on the side of the oppressed, whom Cone identifies as the oppressed Blacks of America.³⁶ Womanist theology goes a step further by suggesting that Black women are even more oppressed; they are the "oppressed of the oppressed." As Jacquelyn Grant maintains, Black women are "the least" or the "little people," with whom God in Christ identifies.³⁷ In Womanist theology, God is viewed not only as Liberator, but also as Creator, Sustainer and Comforter. Delores Williams moves beyond this understanding of God. In her analysis of the biblical story of Hagar, Williams concludes that God has not always delivered African American women from their oppression. Instead, God has often provided a means of survival and quality of life for African American women in the midst of their oppressive situations.³⁸ Thus, African American women experience God not only as Liberator but also as the one concerned with survival and quality of life.

Regarding Jesus, Womanist theology de-emphasizes sexist

³⁶ Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 19; Cone, God of the Oppressed, 136.

³⁷ Jacquelyn Grant, White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 216-17.

³⁸ Delores Williams, 5-6.

connotations surrounding the maleness of Christ and emphasizes the universality of his humanness. On this point Grant argues that

the significance of Christ is not his maleness, but his humanity. The most significant events of Jesus Christ were the life and ministry, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. The significance of these events, in one sense, is that in them the absolute becomes concrete. God becomes concrete not only in the man Jesus, for he was crucified, but in the lives of those who will accept the challenges of the risen Saviour the Christ."

Christ is viewed as Savior of all and not only as Savior of men.

Womanist theology also emphasizes an "egalitarian" Christology which empowers African American women in the quest for justice, liberation and equality. Drawing upon the theologies of Womanist foremothers, Jarena Lee and Sojourner Truth, Grant illustrates how this egalitarian Christology has empowered African American women to challenge oppressive symbols and images in the church. For instance, Jarena Lee fought for the right to preach, Sojourner Truth supported women's participation in the struggle for liberation and Grant boldly asserts that Christ, in the experience of Black women, is a "Black woman."⁴⁰ This egalitarian emphasis, according to Grant, challenges African American women to continue to reflect

³⁹ Grant, White Women's Christ, 220.

⁴⁰ Grant, White Women's Christ, 218-20.

deeply on the images and symbols that inform theological and christological questions.

Furthermore, Womanist theology emphasizes the sustaining and liberating activity of Christ. In Womanist thought, the incarnate Christ not only sustains Black women in the midst of their oppressive situations, but he also participates with them in a "mutual struggle for liberation." This means that as Christ works towards the liberation of Black women, they in turn are working to free Christ from the dominant ideologies, practices and systems that have been imposed upon him and consequently used to oppress Black women.⁴¹ Thus, Black women do not see Jesus as the dominant world has tried to portray him, but they see him and relate to him in liberating, affirming and empowering ways.⁴²

Although the African American church has been celebrated as a source of strength, support, spiritual guidance, education and socio-political action, it has also played a role in the subjugation of African American women. Womanist theology engages in a serious critique of the role of the church in the oppression of African American women. Although African American women have historically made

⁴¹ Jacquelyn Grant, "Womanist Jesus and the Mutual Struggle for Liberation," in The Recovery of Black Presence: An Interdisciplinary Exploration, eds. Randall C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 138-41.

⁴² Grant, "Womanist Jesus," 138-39.

significant contributions (e.g., time, money and commitment) to the church, they are still restricted in many churches and denominations from certain leadership roles, governing bodies and a level of respect that values their personhood and unique gifts. Womanist theology calls for a re-visioning of the role of the African American church that embraces gender justice, egalitarian orientation and empowerment of African American women.⁴³

Finally, the Bible plays a significant role in Womanist theology. It is a primary resource for African American women because it embodies a message of hope and liberation for those who are oppressed. The Bible has also served as a vehicle through which African American women have come to know and understand God. According to Grant, two major sources inform African American women's understanding of God: God's direct revelation in their lives and God's revelation through the Bible as interpreted through their experience.⁴⁴ Although the Bible has meaning for African American women, Womanist theology calls for a reinterpretation of the biblical text, images and symbols that have been used to oppress African American women. Womanist biblical scholars such as Renita J. Weems and

⁴³ Wood, 41-46; Grant, White Women's Christ, 218-19; Marsha Foster Boyd, "Theological Implications of WomanistCare," in WomanistCare: How to Tend the Souls of Women, ed. Linda H. Hollies (Joliet, Ill.: Woman to Woman Ministries, 1991), 51-52.

⁴⁴ Grant, White Women's Christ, 211.

Clarice Martin shed new light on the interpretation of the biblical text when examined from a Womanist perspective.⁴⁵

In summary, Womanist theology addresses the particular concerns of African American women. Its aim is to enlighten and empower African American women to participate in their struggle towards liberation. Furthermore, Womanism affirms and celebrates African American womanhood, placing its beauty and uniqueness in sharp contrast to the negative myths and stereotypes that have historically been perpetuated about African American women.

Womanist Theology and Christian Education

As with Black theology, so Womanist theology has implications for African American Christian education. In this section, the relationship between Womanist theology and Christian education is examined with particular attention to how they can shape the educational ministry of the African American church.

Womanist theology challenges the church to engage in critical dialogue especially with African American women. This dialogue, according to Kelly Brown Douglas, should take place on three different levels: dialogue with Black women's history, which includes an exploration of Black women and

⁴⁵ Renita J. Weems, Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1988); Clarice J. Martin, "Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament: The Quest for Holistic and Inclusive Translation and Interpretation," in Black Theology: A Documentary History, vol. 2: 1980-1992, eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 225-44.

incorporates their experience of slavery; dialogue with ordinary women, which includes the life stories of Black women who are living in African American churches and communities; and dialogue with each other, which includes every person in the learning process."⁶

Womanist theology also encourages the church to recognize and celebrate the unique contributions of African and African American women. One way that this can be done is by exploring the gifts and contributions of women, past and present, who serve as role models for the African American community. Much can be learned from the life and legacy of women like Hatshepsut of Kemet (Egypt), the first female leader of Kemet who ruled during the fifteenth century B.C.; Amina of Hausaland (now Nigeria), a queen and warrior who contributed significantly to the advancement of Hausa trade and crafts in the fifteenth or sixteenth century;⁷ Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) a former slave, abolitionist, and women's rights activist; Ida B. Wells Barnett (1862-1931), a child born in slavery, educator,

⁶ Kelly Brown Douglas, "Teaching Womanist Theology," in Living the Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology, ed. Cheryl J. Sanders (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 150-51.

⁷ Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, Images of African Sisterhood: Initiation and Rites of Passage to Womanhood (Washington, D.C.: Baobab Associates, 1994), 30. See also David Sweetman, Women as Leaders in African History (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heineman Educational Books, 1984) and Ivan Van Sertima, ed., Black Women in Antiquity (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1987).

writer, publisher and civil rights activist; and Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955), an educator, founder of Bethune-Cookman College (a four year accredited college), and former advisor to United States presidents.⁴⁸ Sharing the stories of these and other women can help instill a sense of pride and appreciation for African and African American contributions.

Womanist theology further challenges the church to critique social systems and structures that contribute to the oppression of African Americans, especially African American women. This can be done by analyzing the three-fold oppression of African American women. According to Douglas, an analysis of Black women's oppression will allow persons to identify racial, religious, social, cultural, political and economic structures that inhibit Black women's freedom and justice. An analysis of these structures and systems is critical in helping Black women to name the specific issues and barriers that need to be addressed and changed.⁴⁹ This analysis also allows the church to value the views of Black women regarding God, Jesus, the church, and the Bible, especially important in light of African

⁴⁸ Warfield-Coppock, Images of African Sisterhood, 32-33. See also R. Terborg-Penn, S. Harley and A. B. Rushing, eds., Women in Africa and the African Diaspora (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1989) and Jessie Carney Smith, Notable Black Women (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992)

⁴⁹ Douglas, 153.

American women's experience and oppression.

Finally, Womanist theology can move the church towards an Afrocentric approach to Christian education. Cheryl Sanders, who links womanism and Afrocentrism in relation to theological education, maintains that theological education can benefit from both womanism and Afrocentrism. According to Sanders, the "Afrocentric idea is rooted in the worldview and collective experience of the people of Africa and the African diaspora. Its central concern is to advance the position of African people in the world by affirming their identity and contributions and by unmasking the biases and limits of Eurocentrism."⁵⁰ She goes on to suggest that Afrocentric scholarship seeks to:

(1) celebrate the achievements of African people and cultures; (2) analyze critically the hegemony of the Eurocentric worldview and ways of knowing that have served the interests of racial oppression, especially as they have skewed the self-understanding of African American educators and leaders; and (3) construct an alternative framework for understanding and evaluating human experience. The ultimate end of the celebrative, critical, and constructive dimensions of the Afrocentric impulse is, in the words of Afrocentrist Molefi Asante, to "move to harmony through rhythms that are the African path to transcendence."⁵¹

Thus, theological education that embraces Afrocentrism, particularly from a womanist perspective, must do at least two things: correct deficiencies in black thinking and

⁵⁰ Sanders, "Afrocentric and Womanist Approaches," 157-58.

⁵¹ Sanders, "Afrocentric and Womanist Approaches," 158.

critique Christian symbols, images and practices in order to determine whether they are empowering or oppressive.⁵²

Although Sanders does not provide practical steps for implementation, her approach to theological education is helpful because she challenges the church to reflect critically upon Afrocentrism and womanism as viable sources for theological reflection and Christian education in the African American church. Thus, afrocentrism and womanism can be instrumental in shaping an educational program that is culturally sensitive, critically engaged and constructively oriented.

Insights from Black Theology and Womanist Theology for a Triple-Heritage Model of Christian Education

Three insights for an African American model of Christian education that centers around the triple-heritage emerge from this discussion of Black and Womanist theologies. First, a triple-heritage model of Christian education must be contextualized, emerging out of the experience, history, and culture of African American people. This contextualization occurs on at least two levels: it reflects the general issues and concerns of African American people as revealed through Black theology, and it reflects the particular issues and concerns of individuals within the African American community as suggested by Womanist theology, focusing primarily on African American women.

⁵² Sanders, "Afrocentric and Womanist Approaches," 174.

Thus, a triple-heritage model of Christian education celebrates diversity by recognizing the multidimensional nature of the African American community. This means that Christian education in the African American church must be sensitive to the uniqueness of everyone involved in the educational process and endeavor to explore a wide range of experiences emerging out of African heritage, African American heritage and Christian heritage.

Second, a triple-heritage model of Christian education must be critical. As both Black theology and Womanist theology suggest, it must be engaged in a serious critique of the barriers, obstacles, systems and structures that lead to oppression. A triple-heritage model of Christian education must empower students to fight against these oppressive systems in order to bring about liberation and social change. This critique must focus not only on social systems and structures, but it must also include Christian images, symbols and practices that may be harmful to African American people. Such a critique can be done by developing a curriculum that engages people in liberative praxis, allowing students to reflect on actions, evaluate those actions and engage in revised action. This process must continuously incorporate adjustments as needed.

Along with a serious critique of oppressive systems and structures, a triple-heritage model of Christian education must challenge churches and theological institutions to work

together with community and ecumenical organizations to promote peace, justice, liberation, personal and political empowerment, general health and well being. As churches and theological institutions begin to incorporate courses, seminars and special programs that focus on social concerns, they will be better able to equip people to address the issues that impact their lives and thus empower them to bring about change in their society.

Third, a triple-heritage model of Christian education must be creative. This means that it must draw upon the sources that naturally emerge out of African American culture such as music, dance, folklore and ritual as viable sources for education. These sources are particularly important because they yield powerful implications for Christian education. They not only provide material for content but suggest creative alternatives for the process of education. Through these sources Christian education in the African American church can be enhanced through applied imagination, storytelling, musical expression, creative movement and ritual practices that are common in the African American tradition.

But this creativity also demands that a triple-heritage model of Christian education embrace a variety of teaching methods and techniques. It is not confined to one mode of teaching that can become stagnant and dull. A triple-heritage model of Christian education seeks to incorporate

those teaching methods that allow for the greatest amount of education and draws from modes of teaching that emerge from African, African American and Christian educational traditions. Some of these modes of teaching may include a communal learning process, sharing proverbs and parables, learning by example, and drawing upon experience.

Moreover, a creative triple-heritage model of Christian education moves beyond the classroom to an active exchange and involvement in the community. This approach allows the educational process to tap into resources that are present in the local churches and communities. It also personalizes the educational experience, as Douglas suggests, by embracing the stories of real persons within the church and community. By touching the lives of real persons, the church places itself in a position of addressing the issues and concerns of the community. Thus, the church can be a viable source for transformation and social change.

A triple-heritage model of Christian education is not limited to the local church or community but also seeks to incorporate a global dialogue, especially because of its Pan African awareness. A global dialogue provides opportunities for African Americans to learn about other people (with particular attention to those of African descent), to appreciate other cultures, to hear the voices of others and to stand in solidarity with people all over the world in the struggle for liberation. One way of facilitating a global

dialogue among various peoples is through art and stories. According to Olivia Pearl Stokes, these modes of artistic expression help to build bridges that connect a wide range of people and communities.⁵³ Such a focus challenges the African American church to embrace a global vision that is both multicultural and ecumenical.

Black theology and Womanist theology can play a significant role in shaping the content, method and process of a triple-heritage model of Christian education. As the African American church begins to reflect more seriously upon the relationship between theology and Christian education, it will gain insight into the way they each inform and shape one another and glean valuable resources for developing a broad-based holistic Christian education ministry that is better equipped to address the needs of the African American community.

Although Black theology and Womanist theology can make a positive contribution to Christian education, nevertheless there is one glaring weakness that must be considered. They are primarily emerging in the academy and are not readily accessible, and in many instances not accepted, in the African American church. Laypersons do not always have a working knowledge of these theologies as they relate to the

⁵³ Yolanda Y. Smith and Mary Elizabeth Moore, "Olivia Pearl Stokes: A Living Testimony of Faith," in Faith of Our Foremothers: Women Changing Religious Education, ed. Barbara Anne Keely (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 113.

African American experience. Furthermore, they often lack the vocabulary necessary to engage critical theological issues. Thus, Black theology and Womanist theology often remain an academic exercise. By contrast, the spirituals are already accepted and integrated into the life of the African American church. While we must continue to examine and critique the theology of the spirituals in order to reinterpret them for contemporary African Americans, they can be a way to engage some of the critical issues and concerns facing the African American church and community.

The Theology of the Spirituals

In this section it will be shown that the spirituals can also serve as an important vehicle for theological reflection in the African American church and can therefore contribute to the content and process of Christian education.

As noted in chapter 5 several factors have shaped the spirituals. Henry H. Proctor has further focused this discussion by noting the factors that shaped the theology of the spirituals: Christianity as taught by the slave masters but reinterpreted by the slaves; the worship services conducted by white preachers; religious instruction provided for some slaves emphasizing moral character; African religion and culture; the worship experience through the "invisible institution"; the Bible; nature; and the daily

experiences of life within the bonds of slavery."⁵⁴

We may summarize the influence of these factors by analyzing the spirituals in terms of what the slaves believed about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, humanity, sin and evil, eschatology and Christian ethics. Spirituals embodying these theological themes will be cited where relevant.

God

While a variety of themes about God are present in the spirituals, probably the strongest theme that emerges is the slaves' affirmation that God is on the side of the oppressed. The slaves who created the spirituals believed that God was a deliverer, for God had delivered the Children of Israel from Egypt. Inspired by God's actions on behalf of the Children of Israel, the slaves firmly believed that God would deliver them from their bondage as well. The slaves believed, as Howard Thurman states, "that inasmuch as God is no respecter of persons, what He did for one race He would surely do for another."⁵⁵

One notable spiritual that illustrates this belief is "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?"

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel,
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
An' why not a-every man.
He delivered Daniel f'om de lion's den,

⁵⁴ Proctor, 51-52, 57-58, 63.

⁵⁵ Thurman, 15.

Jonah f'om de belly of de whale,
 An' de Hebrew chillun f'om de fiery furnace,
 An' why not every man.⁵⁶

Other important ideas about God include a belief in God's ability to hear the cries of the slaves and to comfort in time of trouble, God's supernatural power, God's self disclosure in nature and in human consciousness, the righteousness and justice of God, and God's active involvement in history. The slaves' understanding of God reflected their African belief in a Supreme Being, who is the Creator, Sustainer and Controller of the universe and is not limited by time, space or circumstances.

Jesus

While the spirituals as a whole do not speak much about the birth of Jesus, there are numerous references to his nature, suffering, death and resurrection. In the spirituals the slaves recognized both Jesus' divinity and humanity. With regards to his divinity, the slaves acknowledged Jesus as Lord, Conquering King, Reigning King, suffering Savior and Victorious Liberator. They also believed in his supernatural power and in his ability to work with them as well as act on their behalf to overcome oppressive systems. "Ride On King Jesus" exemplifies this liberative understanding of Jesus.

He is King of Kings, He is Lord of Lords, Jesus
 Christ the first and last, no man works like him.

⁵⁶ "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" in Johnson, The Book of American Negro Spirituals, 148-51.

He built his throne up in the air, . . .
 And called his saints from everywhere, . . .
 He pitched his tents on Canaan's ground And broke
 the Roman kingdom down.⁵⁷

With regards to his humanity, the slaves embraced Jesus as a constant companion, mediator and friend. The slaves fully embraced the suffering and death of Jesus. Since they also suffered, they identified with him personally. The spiritual "Calvary" illustrates their reflection on the crucifixion and suffering of Jesus.

Ev'ry time I think about Jesus,
 Ev'ry time I think about Jesus,
 Sho'ly He died on Calvary.
 Calvary, Calvary, Calvary, Calvary,
 Sho'ly He died on Calvary.
 Make me trouble thinkin' 'bout dyin'
 Make me trouble thinkin' 'bout dyin'
 Sho'ly He died on Calvary.⁵⁸

The suffering and death of Jesus held great meaning for the slaves. According to Howard Thurman, "It was not merely the death of a man or a God, but there was in it a quality of identification in experience that continues to burn its way deep into the heart even of the most unemotional."⁵⁹ The slaves also believed in the physical resurrection and the return of Jesus as the spiritual "He Arose" illustrates

He 'rose, He 'rose, He 'rose from the dead,
 He 'rose, He 'rose, He 'rose from the dead,

⁵⁷ See Lovell, Black Song, 231. See also "Ride On, King Jesus," in Songs of Zion, 77, for a variation on the words.

⁵⁸ "Calvary," in Johnson, The Book of American Negro Spirituals, 112-13.

⁵⁹ Thurman, 21.

And the Lord shall bear my spirit home.⁶⁰

Holy Spirit

Four primary themes regarding the Holy Spirit emerged in the spirituals. First, the slaves believed that the Holy Spirit was present and actively involved in their lives.

Phrases such as "Jest befo' day, I feels 'im The sperit, I feels 'im. The sperit, I feels 'im!"⁶¹ and "Oh, I feel the spirit moving, . . ."⁶² reflect the slaves' intimate relationship with the Spirit of God. Through this relationship the slaves affirmed that they could not only feel the presence of the Spirit, but that they were also inspired to respond to the movement of the Spirit in their lives. For the slaves, a common response to the Spirit was prayer as the words "ev'ry time I feel the Spirit moving in my heart, I will pray,"⁶³ illustrate.

Second, the slaves believed that the Holy Spirit was central to their faith conversion. Referring to the Holy Spirit as "the heavenly breeze," the slaves sang:

If you want to catch the heavenly breeze,
Go down in the valley on your knees;
Go bow your knees upon the ground,
An' ask the Lord to turn you 'round.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ "He Arose," in Songs of Zion, 168.

⁶¹ See Raboteau, Slave Religion, 260.

⁶² "There's a Great Camp Meeting," in Songs of Zion, 156.

⁶³ "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit," in Songs of Zion, 121.

⁶⁴ See Proctor, "Theology of the Songs," 55.

The conversion experience, according to Raboteau, was often accompanied by a sense of "anxiety" or "mourning" before "comin' through" to conversion.⁶⁵ Although this experience often required anxiety ridden sinners to diligently seek the Lord, "Go down in de Lonesome Valley, To meet my Jesus dere!"⁶⁶ and to wait patiently upon the Lord, "Jesus call you. Go in de wilderness To wait upon de Lord,"⁶⁷ the ultimate hope of conversion was to reach their heavenly home. ". . . When I was a mourner jus' like you, I want to go to heaven when I die, I fast and I prayed till I came thro', For I want to go to heaven when I die. . . ."⁶⁸

The third theme that emerges regarding the Holy Spirit is the slaves' belief that the Spirit initiated and empowered worship. For the slave community, it was the Spirit that enabled the preaching, singing, praying, shouting and genuine response to the Spirit of God. The following spiritual illustrates:

I'm gonna sing when the Spirit says a-Sing,
I'm gonna sing when the Spirit says a-Sing,
I'm gonna sing when the Spirit says a-Sing,
And obey the Spirit of the Lord.⁶⁹

The verses repeat replacing the word "sing" with "shout,"

⁶⁵ Raboteau, 253, 266-67.

⁶⁶ Raboteau, 254.

⁶⁷ Raboteau, 254.

⁶⁸ See Raboteau, Slave Religion, 254-55.

⁶⁹ "I'm Gonna Sing," in Songs of Zion, 81.

"preach," and "pray." This spiritual suggests that the Spirit motivates and inspires the worship experience. As Costen notes the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the slaves empowered both their personal and corporate worship experience.⁷⁰ This experience was significant because it created an environment for the slaves not only to worship God, but to express the cares and concerns of the community in worship.

Fourth, the spirituals reveal that the Holy Spirit provided the slaves with comfort, wisdom, discernment and strength to endure the hardships of bondage. The spiritual "Balm in Gilead," embodies these themes.

There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole,
 There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul.
 Sometimes I feel discouraged, And think my work's in vain,
 But then the Holy Spirit Revives my soul again.
 Don't ever feel discouraged, For Jesus is your friend,
 And if you look for knowledge, He'll ne'er refuse to lend.
 If you cannot preach like Peter, If you cannot pray like Paul,
 you can tell the love of Jesus, And say "He died for all."⁷¹

The Holy Spirit played an integral role in the life of the slave community. In the invisible institution, it was the movement of the Holy Spirit that birthed their creative expression in worship; it was the power of the Holy Spirit that united the common concerns of the people; and it was

⁷⁰ Costen, 40.

⁷¹ "Balm in Gilead," in Songs of Zion, 123.

the comfort of the Holy Spirit that allowed the slave community to endure the hardships of their existential reality. Although the Word of God was distorted by the slave owners, the Spirit of God allowed the slaves to see beyond the hypocrisy of the slave owners and to discern the true essence of God's message of love and salvation. Through the love of God, the Holy Spirit strengthened their faith and inspired a sense of hope for the future that envisioned liberation and freedom from their oppression.

Humanity

In relationship to humanity, at least two theological themes may be identified. First, the slaves believed that they were children of God. This belief was evident in numerous spirituals where the slaves referred to themselves as "all God's chillun'," "born of God," "God's chillun'" and "little children"⁷² in relationship to God's Kingdom. The slaves also frequently referred to heaven as home, which indicates their identity with God as heavenly Parent.

Soon-a will be done-a with the troubles of the world,
 Troubles of the world,
 The troubles of the world.
 Soon-a will be done-a with the troubles of the world.

⁷² See for example, "I've Got a Robe," "De Gospel Train," "Climbin' Up d' Mountain," "Free At Last," in Songs of Zion, 82, 116, 120, 80; "Hallelujah!" in Johnson, The Book of American Negro Spirituals, 172-73; "Chillun, Did You Hear When Jesus Rose?" in Dixon, Negro Spirituals, 78.

Goin' home to live with God."⁷³

The slaves' sense of their own humanity was validated by their belief that they were children of God. Thurman illustrates this point in his discussion about the antebellum Negro preacher who was responsible for the overall spiritual development of the slave community. According to Thurman, it was the preacher's responsibility to remind the slaves that they were created in God's image and therefore children of God."⁷⁴

Second, the slaves expressed a longing for freedom, not only in reference to trials, tribulations, sin and evil; but also in regards to freedom from slavery. This longing for freedom was often expressed as a desire for death. Thurman's comments on freedom emphasize this point as he states, "freedom from slavery and freedom from life were often synonymous in the thought of those early singers. With actual freedom no closer, . . . death seemed the only hope."⁷⁵ The following spiritual illustrates the slaves desire to be free.

O freedom! O freedom!
O freedom over me!
An' befo' I'd be a slave,
I'll be buried in my grave,

⁷³ "Soon-a Will Be Done," in Songs of Zion, 158; See also "City Called Heaven," "Trampin," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and "Tryin' to Get Home," in Songs of Zion, 135, 111, 104, 130.

⁷⁴ Thurman, 11-12.

⁷⁵ Thurman, 29.

An' go home to my Lord an' be free."⁷⁶

There has been some debate about the otherworldliness focus of the spirituals, particularly since numerous spirituals reflect the slaves desire to leave this world of trouble for a more blissful place (heaven), that is free from the trials and tribulations of this world. While some argue that this focus did not motivate the slaves to strive for their earthly freedom, others such as James Cone and Dwight Hopkins, argue to the contrary. They maintain that the slaves' hope for freedom was not only a desire for something outside of their reality, but it was also a desire for freedom in terms of liberation from the bonds of slavery."⁷⁷ Dwight Hopkins emphasizes this point by suggesting that because the slaves knew that they were created to be free and recognized their "God-given humanity," this realization encouraged them to strive for their freedom."⁷⁸

Sin and Evil

Several themes arise in relationship to sin and evil. The slaves saw Satan as a real being who was associated with evil. He was depicted in many of the spirituals as a

⁷⁶ See Thurman, Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks, 29.

⁷⁷ Cone, Spirituals and the Blues, 78-87; Hopkins, 1992, 29-32.

⁷⁸ Hopkins, 29-32.

crafty, deceitful "snake in the grass"⁷⁹ who was responsible for the presence of sin and evil in the world. The slaves also referred to Satan as a conjurer, who operated in the spiritual realm of evil, as expressed in "O, Satan is a liar, and he conjure too, And if you don't mind, he'll conjure you."⁸⁰ This notion of a conjurer can be traced to the African belief that a conjurer, was a person of supernatural power who was "two-faced" or "two-handed": he or she either worked for good or evil. Since the slaves believed that any type of misfortune, destruction or unusual illness was the result of "another's animosity" or "conjure," it is easy to see how the slaves adapted this view and applied it to Satan.⁸¹ Thus Satan was perceived not only as an "arch-enemy of the soul," but also as an "enemy of all righteousness," whose kingdom must be destroyed.⁸²

Cone expands this view of Satan by suggesting that he represented more than just a being who embodied evil, but that he also represented all aspects of the evil institution

⁷⁹ Proctor, 59; Odum and Johnson, 39.

⁸⁰ "Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel," in Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Slave Songs and Spirituals," in Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness, ed. Milton C. Sernett (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 123. See also Raboteau, 257 and Odum and Johnson, 39.

⁸¹ Raboteau, 275-84.

⁸² Proctor, 59. See also Odum and Johnson, 38-42.

of slavery.⁸³ He maintains that the slaves associated their own experience of oppression with the activity of Satan, whom they believed was the "Evil One" portrayed in the Bible. Thus, they understood Satan not only as one who perpetuates sin and evil, but also as one whose influence pervades the evil structures in the world including those structures that supported slavery.⁸⁴ The following verses illustrate the connection the slaves made between Satan and slavery.

Ole Satan like dat hunting dog,
He hunt dem Christians home to God.
Ole Satan thought he had me fas';
Broke his chain an' I'm free at las'.⁸⁵

In this respect, Satan is given not only a religious meaning, but a social interpretation as well.

The slaves not only associated sin and evil with Satan, but they also believed that sin brings about death, destruction, and eternal estrangement from God. Jesus was seen as the one who overcomes the sinfulness of the world through his death and resurrection. Thus, sinners are encouraged to flee sin and evil and to turn to Jesus. The following spiritual, entitled "Come Sinner, Come," illustrates this invitation to come to Jesus.

Won't you come, won't you come?

⁸³ Cone, Spirituals and the Blues, 71-73.

⁸⁴ Cone, Spirituals and the Blues, 73.

⁸⁵ See Odum and Johnson, Negro and His Songs, 40-41; See also Cone, Spirituals and the Blues, 73.

Come, sinner come;
 Great day of wrath is comin':
 Come, sinner, come.
 Look over yonder what I see;
 Come, sinner come;
 Two tall angels comin' after me;
 Come, sinner come."⁶

Although sin and evil were manifested in a variety of ways, the slaves held firm to their belief that the sins of this world could be overcome through the power of Jesus.

Eschatology

In the spirituals there are numerous references to heaven, hell, judgment, and the resurrection. Heaven is portrayed as a beautiful, blissful place where the righteous will go to be with Jesus. It is also a place where there will be no more pain and sorrow, trials and tribulations or pressures of this world. Hell on the other hand is a place of eternal punishment for Satan and his followers. In the spirituals, eternal torment is described as the punishment for the wicked, while eternal bliss is the reward for the righteous. The Judgment Day signifies the return of Jesus in order to judge everyone including the living and the dead. As described in the Bible, the slaves believed that everyone would have to stand before the "judgment bar" and give an account for their actions on earth.

You'd better min' how you talk,
 you'd better min' what you talkin' about,
 You got to give account in de Judgment,

⁶ "Come Sinner, Come," in Odum and Johnson, Negro and His Songs, 78.

you'd better min'."

In terms of the resurrection, the slaves believed not only in Jesus' resurrection, but also in the resurrection of the righteous. The slaves' eschatology also reveals a strong otherworld flavor. However, on this point, James Cone argues that the references to "heaven" and the "promised land," in some spirituals, actually carried a double meaning. The reference represented a coded message for a specific place of escape. He also maintains that this understanding of the coded message within the spirituals illustrates the desire and actions on the part of some slaves to liberate themselves from their earthly bondage." "All God's Chillun Got Wings" illustrates the slaves notion of heaven as well as their use of a coded message.

I got a robe, you got a robe,
All o' God's Chillun got a robe.
When I get to heab'n I'm goin' to put on my robe,
I'm goin' to shout all ovah God's Heab'n, . . .
Ev'rybody talkin' 'bout heab'n ain't goin' dere;
Heab'n, Heab'n, I'm goin' to shout all ovah
God's Heab'n."

This spiritual also seems to illustrate a sense of continuity between heaven and earth, particularly since this concept embraces the African idea of sacredness which views all of reality as sacred. Although the slaves were still on

" "You'd Better Min'," in Songs of Zion, 125.

" Cone, Spirituals and the Blues, 78-82.

" "All God's Chillun Got Wings," in Johnson, Book of American Negro Spirituals, 71-73.

earth, they saw themselves as "God's chillun" who were included in God's love and plan for salvation. The reward for their faithfulness on earth was the joy of "heab'n" and all of its benefits.

Christian Ethics

Living ethically is a constant theme in the spirituals. One needs to "live right"; to "trust God"; to "lay down sinful ways"; to pray as a vital part of one's existence, as well as one's relationship with God; to serve God faithfully; to convert and live in relationship with Jesus; to respect others; to bear one another's burdens; and to avoid hypocrisy. Throughout is the acknowledgement that the Christian life is a journey as well as a growing process and, most importantly, that the Bible is a guidebook for the journey.

The following spiritual illustrates the slaves' view of the Bible.

For in dat Bible you will see,
 Jesus died fer you an' me.
 Matthew, Mark, Luke an' John
 Tell me where my Master's gone.
 Go read de fifth of Matthew
 An' read de chapter through,
 It is de guide to Christians,
 An' tell 'em what to do.
 Now take yo' Bible an' read it through,
 An' ev'y word you fin' is true."⁹⁰

In his discussion of the spirituals, Proctor describes the slaves' view of the Christian life as the "ideal one--a

⁹⁰ See Odum and Johnson, Negro and His Song, 52.

life of dependence, of trust, of service and communion; a life linked with God, the Infinite One."⁹¹ Although the slaves' view of the Christian life sustained them in their hope for freedom, it is important to note that the Christian life was not merely a passive life, but a life of action and involvement in the struggle for liberation.

The theology that arises out of the spirituals is certainly rich and warrants a deeper analysis. A greater understanding of the spirituals can assist in theological construction, as well as in a practical application of the major theological themes.

Insights from the Spirituals for a Triple-Heritage Model of Christian Education

The spirituals may be helpful in developing a Christian education program that centers around the triple-heritage. For one thing, the spirituals can be a means through which the entire life and ministry of the church can center around the presence of God. As congregations engage in singing the spirituals, persons can be awakened to the reality of God and new life in Christ. The spirituals can also inspire a greater sense of spirituality by moving persons towards a deeper relationship with God, self and others by providing opportunities for persons to share their own stories in light of the spirituals, or to create their own spirituals about God's presence and active involvement in their

⁹¹ Proctor, 56.

individual lives and in the life of the Church. Sharing stories is a powerful way for persons to move beyond an abstract reflection of God to a concrete encounter with the Divine.

Second, the spirituals can encourage African Americans to remember their past with all of the hurt, pain and sorrow that it embodies, but with the assurance that remembering will help to bring about healing and wholeness. Such remembering, which encourages individual, communal and liturgical involvement, is referred to by Maria Harris as mythic remembering: "gazing at what originally terrifies, and turning it into a symbol of hope and new life."²² Remembering can inspire within African Americans a sense of connection with African and African American ancestors, a deep respect for the legacy that they have left behind, and a renewed sense of hope for the future. Spirituals can assist African Americans in remembering their past by providing an alternative to many of the more contemporary worship songs. For example, while many praise songs prepare the congregation for worship, they tend to focus primarily upon the universal presence of God. The spirituals, however, inspire a deeper reflection upon God's particular involvement in the life of the African American community throughout history. Although praise songs can play a

²² Maria Harris, Women and Teaching: Themes for a Spirituality of Pedagogy (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 34.

significant role in the African American church the spirituals encourage African Americans to celebrate their full heritage as they remember God's presence and active involvement in African American Christian heritage.

Third, the spirituals, can inspire a deeper sense of community, true koinonia, where people genuinely love, nurture and support one another. This bond of fellowship, which was evident in the slave community, can empower unity and self determination in the continued struggle for freedom, liberation and social change today. Communal fellowship can also encourage persons to reach out to one another in an effort to stand in solidarity with all oppressed people in the world. In this sense, God's redemption and liberation in Jesus Christ becomes both a spiritual as well as a social activity. Spirituals can nurture a communal environment and a vision for social change by exploring African, African American and Christian strategies that have been effective in bringing about communal transformation and change. The spirituals can thus equip African Americans to participate in concrete ways in the life of their communities. The emphasis, however, of the spirituals is not solely on external relationships, rather they provide a way of helping people recognize and bond more deeply with the African, African American and Christian communities of past and present. This accent takes seriously the internal relationships as well as the

external.

Fourth, the spirituals can help African Americans to gain a deeper sense of pride in their triple-heritage as Africans, African Americans and Christians. As African Americans sing the spirituals, in that moment, they can become aware--consciously or unconsciously--of their African, African American and Christian heritages. One of the major tasks of an African American model of Christian education is to encourage African Americans to celebrate their full heritage by reflecting upon the positive aspects of each element of the triple-heritage. Embracing and valuing the triple-heritage reminds African Americans that they are made in the image of God and that they are indeed valued persons in society.

Finally, the spirituals can be a valuable source for moving the African American church towards a triple-heritage model of Christian education that is Spirit-centered. Such a model of Christian education is empowered by the Holy Spirit and enables the church to carry out the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ. The spirituals can enable the church to not only center upon the Holy Spirit, but also to participate more fully with the movement of the Spirit. This mutual interaction with the Holy Spirit was evident in the slave community. For instance, in the slave community the use of the spirituals in the invisible institution enhanced the movement of the Holy Spirit and allowed the

worshippers to participate with the Spirit in a unique way. As the entire congregation joined together in song, they were intimately united together in the Spirit. According to Melva Costen, it was the movement of the Holy Spirit through the music and song that invited Africans in America into a deeper relationship with God and others. Costen further notes that singing "provides a divine channel through which God speaks and believers respond."⁹³ To elaborate this point Costen states:

For an African people, music is not merely a means of expressing feelings. It [music] evokes the reciprocal activity of imagination and understanding of the soul. Since the soul is the center of God's human work, only the believer's love of God allows the soul to respond through and in music. Thus . . . the sound of music born of human breath bore witness to the presence and love of God in the being of Black folks from the beginning of time."⁹⁴

Costen's discussion affirms that music is intimately tied to the very being of African American people. She goes on to suggest that "singing has a mysterious power that frees the human spirit so that the Spirit of God can penetrate and, in the words of James Cone, also 'intensify the power of the Spirit's presence with the people.'"⁹⁵

⁹³ Costen, 44.

⁹⁴ Melva Costen, "Singing Praise to God in African American Worship Contexts," in African American Religious Studies, ed. Gayraud S. Wilmore (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989), 393, cited in Costen, African American Christian Worship, 44.

⁹⁵ Costen, 45.

Singing was not intended to exploit the Spirit, instead, "singing, . . . helped create a mood of freedom, an openness to quicken an awareness of God's presence, and for the hearing and receiving of God's grace."⁹⁶ In essence, the Holy Spirit awakened the slave community to the reality of God; invited the worshipers into a deeper relationship with God and others; and empowered them to reach out to one another by creating a fellowship of love and support that would sustain them, in the midst of their struggle to endure the harsh reality of their daily existence.

The purpose of Spirit-centered education, according to Frank Rogers, is "to deepen person's capacities to see and to be taken by the reconciling activity of God in our world and in our lives and to empower person's capacities to participate in that activity with an increasingly free fluidity."⁹⁷ The spirituals beautifully fulfill this criterion. Engaging with the spirituals as embodiments of the triple-heritage is one way that the African American church can participate more freely with the Spirit and bring about a fuller fellowship with God, self, nature and the world. These ideas will be developed more fully in the final chapter.

⁹⁶ Costen, 45.

⁹⁷ Rogers, 5.

CHAPTER 7

A Tri-Collaborative Model for Teaching the Triple-Heritage through the African American Spirituals

Thus far we have explored the unique character of the triple-heritage and examined the spirituals as a viable source for enlarging the educational ministry in the African American church. This chapter proposes a tri-collaborative model of Christian education that embraces the triple-heritage of African Americans and incorporates the African American spirituals as a vehicle for experiencing, expressing and teaching the triple-heritage.

Re-Statement of the Problem

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that, since many African American churches do not fully incorporate the triple-heritage in their Christian education ministries, African Americans are in danger of losing valuable aspects of their heritage. Two major factors have contributed to this problem. First, many African Americans lack a sense of love and respect for themselves as African people created in the image of God. As noted in Chapter 1, this lack of love and respect has been perpetuated through distorted interpretations of African contributions throughout biblical and social history. Consequently, African contributions have been ignored, re-interpreted or re-imaged to communicate Eurocentric characteristics, standards and

values.

Unfortunately, many African American churches have embraced and incorporated these distortions in their Bible studies, worship and religious practices. For instance, pictures of white biblical characters still hang on the walls of many African American Sunday School classrooms. Some churches have also eliminated all modes of worship that resemble their heritage. Still other churches reflect upon their African American heritage only during the Martin Luther King, Jr., birthday celebration or Black History Month.

As argued in Chapter 1, many of these churches fail to realize that the religious experience of African Americans is different from those of the dominant culture. Their understandings and experiences of God are different from those who have never known persecution and oppression. Furthermore, the rich legacy of African American heritage and indigenous modes of cultural and religious expression are denied.

Second, many African American churches incorporate growth strategies, teaching methods and curriculum resources that do not reflect their triple-heritage. In Chapter 2, the analysis revealed that many African American churches have patterned themselves after European American churches and adopted Eurocentric modes of worship, education and religious practices. Although many churches have re-

affirmed their African heritage as a result of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, the triple-heritage is not yet fully incorporated in the educational ministries of these churches.

The congregational studies in Chapter 3 confirm this point. While all of the churches analyzed in this study incorporated numerous growth strategies for developing their Sunday Schools, only one of the churches mentioned an emphasis on their African American Christian heritage. This suggests that, while some African American churches are busy trying to grow their Sunday Schools, often using curriculum resources with no sensitivity to African American culture, they are in danger of losing the legacy of their rich heritage. Although I was able to glean insights from the growth strategies and draw out guidelines for a triple-heritage model of Christian education, I discovered that many churches are less concerned with celebrating their African American heritage than with celebrating their Christian heritage.

Finally, the study in Chapter 4 of the curriculum resources designed for and used by African Americans revealed that while two of the four curriculum resources analyzed in this study did an adequate job of presenting the triple-heritage, the other two either hinted at the need for African Americans to reflect on their cultural heritage in light of their Christian faith or treated the African

American heritage as secondary to the biblical presentation.

African Americans can have a holistic Christian experience by celebrating their full heritage as Africans, African Americans and Christians. A tri-collaborative model for teaching the triple-heritage through the African American spirituals can facilitate African Americans in this effort. We now turn to a discussion of this model of Christian education.

A Tri-Collaborative Triple-Heritage Model of Christian Education

In Chapters 5 and 6 we examined some possible solutions for the problem. The spirituals were identified as embodiments of the triple-heritage and as sources for deeper insights into the theology and function of the spirituals in the African American church. These two solutions come together in a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model of Christian education.

The Model Defined

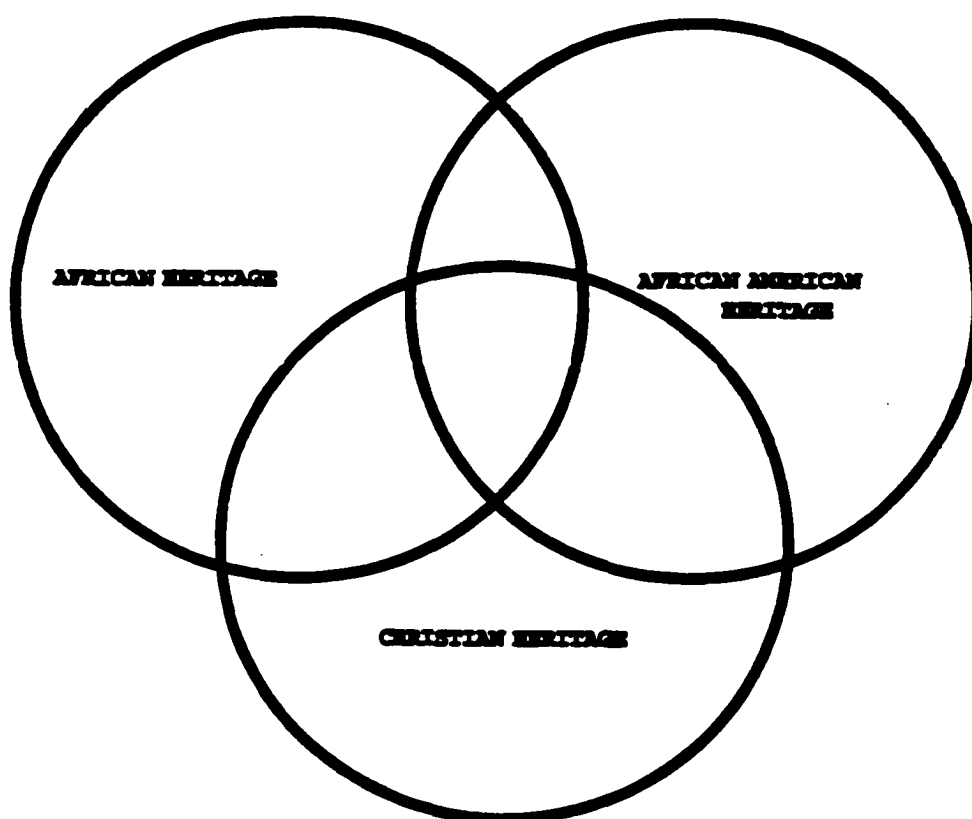
Tri-collaborative means that there are three components of this model of Christian education: African, African American and Christian. Each component works cooperatively in order to present a balanced or holistic view of the triple-heritage. As previously noted, the triple-heritage has three vital components that together make up a unique whole. These components are intimately intertwined with distinctive characteristics and traditions. The three

elements draw upon one another, flow out of each other and build upon each other. In a similar fashion, the tri-collaborative triple-heritage model of Christian education must be seen as a whole unit, with interrelated components rather than as three separate and distinct elements.

Diagram 1 illustrates the three major components of the model.

DIAGRAM 1

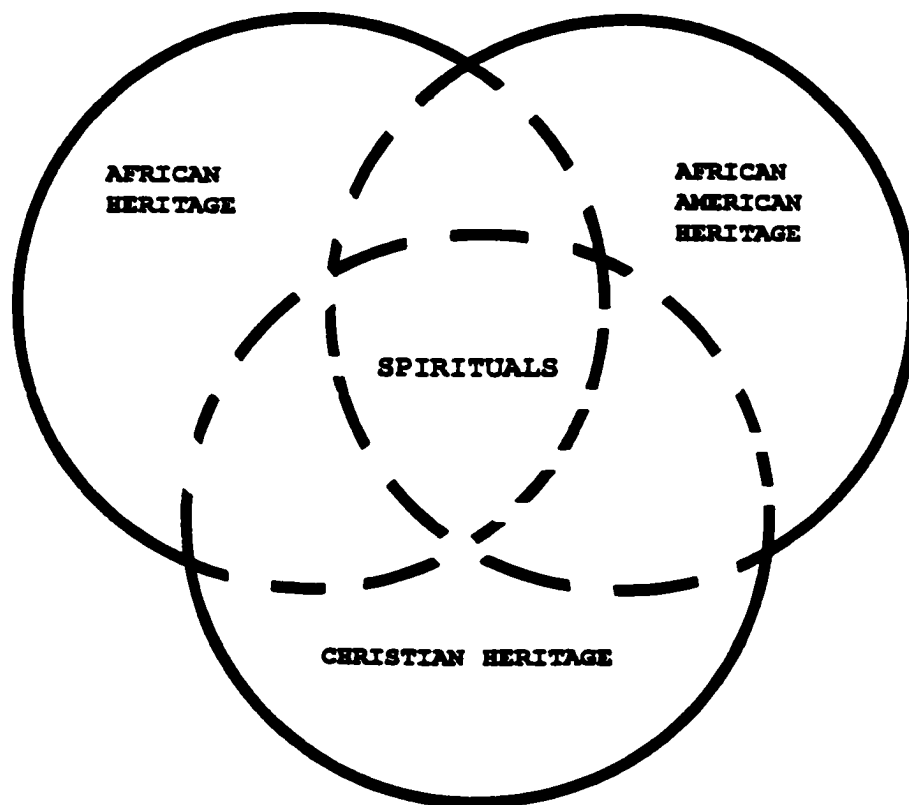
**Tri-Collaborative Triple-Heritage Model of
Christian Education - Major Components**



The central point of intersection is where the spirituals draw the three components together and where the reflection upon the educational process begins. Diagram 2 illustrates how the three components of the model come together in the spirituals. The broken lines reflect the dynamic relationship among the components.

DIAGRAM 2

**Tri-Collaborative Triple-Heritage Model
The Spirituals at the Central Point of Intersection**



In short, the collaborative nature of this model of Christian education can be observed through three perspectives. First, there is a collaborative relationship among the three components: African, African American and Christian. Second, the three components are in a collaborative relationship with the spirituals. While the spirituals are informed by the triple-heritage they also shape the heritage. Third, educators and learners are in a collaborative relationship with the educational model. As educators and learners are influenced by the model, the model is also influenced by those who participate in the educational process. This dynamic interchange echoes Maria Harris' notion of fashioning. In her book Fashion Me a People, Harris maintains that as curriculum fashions or shapes people, people in turn fashion curriculum.¹

Purpose

The purpose of a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model of Christian education is three-fold: to allow African Americans to preserve and celebrate their full heritage as Africans, African Americans and Christians; to explore alternative approaches to Christian education that draw upon the resources that naturally emerge from African American Christian heritage and to present the triple-heritage in a balanced fashion throughout the curriculum so that each

¹ Maria Harris, Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 17.

component is fully represented.

Curriculum Design

A tri-collaborative triple-heritage model incorporates three essential elements of curriculum design. First, it embodies what Mary Elizabeth Moore refers to as a planned course or a "pathway (course) over which persons travel on a journey" of faith.² In the Christian context, the triple-heritage curriculum forms such a faith journey. Although Moore emphasizes the map as a metaphor for describing this planned course, she expands the metaphor to include the travelers, the guidebook, the travel plans and the guide. She also notes that since people, places and life circumstances are always changing, the map must be continuously revised. Thus, the primary purpose of curriculum, according to Moore, is to give guidance throughout the journey of faith.³ In a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model, a planned course gives guidance for African Americans seeking to know more about their cultural heritage in light of their Christian faith.

Second, a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model embraces a comprehensive view of curriculum, which includes

² Mary Elizabeth Moore, "Rhythmic Curriculum: Guiding an Educative Journey," paper presented in the symposium *Les Rythmes Educatifs dans la Philosophie de Whitehead*, Université Catholique de Lille, Lille, France, 25-27 April 1994), 11.

³ Mary Elizabeth Moore, 11.

the "entire course of the church's life."⁴ Maria Harris has broadened the traditional understanding of curriculum, by suggesting that curriculum includes not only teaching, schooling and printed resources, but also various forms of church life such as worship, preaching, community and service. She goes on to suggest that this comprehensive curriculum is intergenerational and creative, embracing multiple forms of education.⁵ In a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model, all aspects of church life are embraced as curriculum, particularly since participation in the various facets of church life has been a common mode of education in the African American church. For example, persons have typically learned to pray by participating in prayer service. Likewise, individuals have learned the spirituals and the stories of African ancestors by participating in worship. A comprehensive view of curriculum allows the church to draw upon educational opportunities that emerge whenever the church gathers in community for fellowship and nurture, as well as when the church scatters throughout the broader community in outreach and service.

Third, a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model draws upon the oral tradition of storytelling, proverbs, folktales, music, dance, poetry, ritual, metaphor, and

⁴ Maria Harris, Fashion Me a People, 17.

⁵ Maria Harris, Fashion Me a People, 17-18.

drumming as a viable source of curriculum. Although many African American churches have abandoned the oral tradition in favor of formal education and printed resources, Ella Mitchell argues that the oral tradition "is a legitimate system of teaching and learning" and that the African American church should not forget this valuable mode of education.⁶ This system of learning, grounded in African tradition, was not only creative and fun, but it allowed African slaves to transmit important information. In a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model, the oral tradition allows the church to draw upon resources that naturally emerge from African American tradition as viable modes of education. Furthermore, it inspires African Americans to reclaim indigenous cultural expression throughout the educational process.

Criterion. The major criterion for a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model of Christian education is that each aspect of the triple-heritage must be present throughout the entire educational process. Although at times one aspect may be more dominant than others, each component must be present and explored simultaneously throughout the process.

The starting point for a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model is at the point of intersection where the three components meet through the African American spirituals. We cannot start with one aspect of the heritage

⁶ Ella Mitchell, 98, 111-12.

over the others. To do so would mean breaking up the heritage which results in a sense of disconnectedness.

A major problem of curriculum systems is the tendency to compartmentalize and separate major components in an effort to give adequate attention to each aspect of the curriculum. Moore has explored this sense of disconnectedness and identifies at least three ways curriculum can be disconnected. First, subject matter and educational methods are isolated. This occurs when experts such as systematic theologians and religious educators are invited to develop various aspects of the curriculum, yet they never consult with one another or with the teachers and learners who will engage the curriculum materials. Second, curriculum themes, such as life-centered or bible-centered themes, are not brought together in a single presentation. Instead they are addressed separately, either through different curriculum resources or at different times within the same resource. Moore maintains that a deeper integration of these issues is necessary so that they may be addressed more fully in relation to one another. Third, curriculum makers are disconnected from curriculum users. A lack of experience, knowledge and understanding of the curriculum users and their life experiences results in materials that are irrelevant and insensitive to particular concerns of those for whom the curriculum was intended.⁷

⁷ Mary Elizabeth Moore, 9-11.

Just as various curricula are characterized by disconnectedness, the tri-collaborative model is in danger of the same type of disconnectedness. Therefore it must be viewed as a whole unit that cannot be separated. The spirituals help to facilitate this process by drawing the three components together at the center of the model. It is in the spirituals that we begin to reflect on the triple-heritage as a whole unit with three interrelated parts that function cooperatively through a dynamic and integrative relationship.

Characteristics. At least four characteristics describe a triple-heritage educational model informed by the spirituals: it is communal, it is creative, it is critical and it inspires cooperative action.

(1) **Communal** - Since the spirituals were created and sung in community, they inspire a sense of community through the educational process. This sense of community draws students and teachers together in a mutual dialogue often in the form of a call and response. The call and response, grounded in African music, usually begins with a chant, sung by a leader, that is followed by the group or congregation. This rhythm, seen in the spiritual "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," reveals the communal nature of the spirituals.

Leader: Swing low, sweet chariot,
 Response: Coming for to carry me home:
 Leader: Swing low, sweet chariot,

Response: Coming for to carry me home.*

A triple-heritage model promotes such a communal dialogue, encouraging both students and teachers to participate fully in the educational process. Since each person brings something valuable to the dialogue, anyone may begin the call and response at any time, engaging the entire community in a dynamic exchange of ideas and experiences.

(2) Creative - Zora Neal Hurston noted that the spirituals are always in the process of creation.⁸ Since a common characteristic of the spirituals is improvisation, they can be shaped and reshaped to accommodate a particular situation or event. As previously shown, the words in the spiritual, "Don't Let Nobody Turn You Round," were adapted to "Don't let segregation turn you around," and used during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. In a similar fashion, Christian education through a tri-collaborative model is always in the process of creation. Both the model and participants are shaped and reshaped throughout the educational process. Drawing upon resources that naturally emerge from the African, African American and Christian traditions, this model seeks to incorporate creative ideas, creative methodology and creative programming.

(3) Critical - Some spirituals possess a dual or hidden meaning which once allowed the slave community to

* "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," in Songs of Zion, 104.

⁸ Hurston, 15.

communicate secret messages with one another, without being detected by their masters. This feature, grounded in African tradition, allowed the slaves to relate words of insult, history, wisdom, humor and critique. For instance, the words "ev'rybody talkin' 'bout heav'n ain't goin' there,"¹⁰ were often used to mock slaveholders and to critique their religious hypocrisy. Just as the slaves critiqued their world through the spirituals, a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model seeks to engage students in a serious critique of the barriers, obstacles, systems and structures that lead to oppression. This model seeks to empower African Americans to bring about liberation and social change by involving them in a liberative praxis that stimulates critical reflection and action within the community.

(4) Cooperative Action - The desire for freedom, "Oh, freedom! Oh, freedom! Oh, freedom all over me!"¹¹ motivated many slaves to resist the bonds of slavery. Consequently, the slave community joined together in a cooperative effort to assist in the escape of hundreds of slaves. As indicated earlier, one of the most successful efforts was the underground railroad led by Harriet Tubman. Through cooperative action, the slave community united in the struggle for freedom, liberation and social change. In a

¹⁰ "I've Got a Robe," in Songs of Zion, 82.

¹¹ "Oh, Freedom," in Songs of Zion, 102.

similar fashion, a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model seeks to engage African Americans in cooperative action that will bring about transformation and change in their communities. Cooperative action challenges the church to move beyond the classroom to active involvement in both local and global communities.

Content and Process. Every aspect of the triple-heritage contributes to the content and process of a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model. Since content and process are so deeply related in the spirituals, they are not distinguished in this discussion of the model. By reflecting on the spirituals, numerous possibilities emerge for subject matter and for creative approaches to the educational process. The spirituals actually embody several qualities of the educational model. Some of these qualities--dialogue, imagination, spontaneity, rhythm, narrative, nature and ritual--will guide our exploration of the triple-heritage.¹²

(1) Dialogue - As in Africa, music played an important role in the slave community, particularly since it permeated all aspects of life--work, play, leisure, religious observances and artistic expression. On a deeper level, music was a vehicle for the slaves to express their criticism, inner feelings, unvoiced desires and aspirations.

¹² It is important to remember that the triple-heritage is a unit with interrelated parts. However, the components are discussed separately in this section for clarity.

No more auction block for me,
 No more, No more,
 No more auction block for me,
 Many thousand gone.¹³

Music not only allowed the slaves to express their thoughts and feelings, but more specifically, many spirituals, embodying a dialogical or call and response quality, enabled the slaves to communicate among themselves.

Leader: Get you ready, there's a
 Response: meeting here tonight,
 Leader: Come along, there's a
 Response: meeting here tonight.¹⁴

Finally, the spirituals, expressed in the form of prayer, allowed the slaves to share their cares and concerns with God.

Someone's cryin', Lord,
 Kum ba yah,
 Oh, Lord,
 Kum ba yah.¹⁵

By reflecting on the dialogical nature of the spirituals, we can explore the African aspect of the triple-heritage and consider how dialogue was used in African music as a form of communication and critique. Levine notes that a common practice among African peoples was to express their feelings about one another and their leaders in an open forum, through music, dance, metaphor and other modes of

¹³ "Many Thousand Gone," in Songs of Zion, 137.

¹⁴ "There's a Meeting Here Tonight," in Songs of Zion, 91.

¹⁵ "Kum Ba Yah, My Lord," in Songs of Zion, 139; Dixon, 7. "Kum ba yah" is usually translated as "come by here."

artistic expression without fear of punishment.¹⁶

Exploring the dialogue in spirituals also reveals the influence of African music on African American music and culture, especially on gospel music, jazz and blues, dance, literature and art. We can discover a dialogue within the music and art but also a dialogue among African people, across cultures and generations. Finally, the dialogical quality of spirituals reveals the strength of dialogical prayer in Christian heritage. Spirituals such as "Kum Ba Yah My Lord" and "Lord, I Want to Be a Christian" are actual prayers in song; studying them may spark numerous questions for discussion such as what is prayer, what kind of dialogue is it, and how does one pray. This could lead, also, to a study of prayers in the Bible, and of personal and communal prayer and prayer in various African, African American and Christian communities.

Dialogue through the spirituals may suggests several approaches to the educational process such as choral reading, antiphonal and responsive reading, litany,¹⁷ large and small group discussion, and role play. For example,

¹⁶ Levine, 7-10.

¹⁷ Choral reading involves group and solo presentations of a particular passage. Antiphonal reading consists of one group reading or reciting a passage and another group responding or answering antiphonally. Responsive reading consists of a leader reading and a group responding. Litany involves a leader reading several statements and a group briefly responding (the same phrase is often repeated throughout the litany).

choral reading can be a dramatic way of presenting historical information, narratives, poetry, songs and stories that emerge from the three streams of the triple-heritage. The following presentation of James Weldon Johnson's poem, "O Black and Unknown Bards" could provide a powerful choral reading.

O black and unknown bards of long ago,
 How came your lips to touch the sacred fire?
 How, in your darkness, did you come to know
 The power and beauty of the minstrel's lyre?
 Who first from midst his bonds lifted his eyes?
 Who first from out the still watch, lone and long,
 Feeling the ancient faith of prophets rise
 Within his dark-kept soul, burst into song?

Heart of what slave poured out such melody
 As "Steal away to Jesus"? On its strains
 His spirit must have nightly floated free,
 Though still about his hands he felt his chains.
 Who heard great "Jordan roll"? Whose starward eye
 Saw chariot "swing low"? And who was he
 That breathed that comforting, melodic sigh,
 "Nobody knows de trouble I see"?¹⁸

Such a reading could be developed by assigning several persons and/or groups various lines to read from the poem. An outline for this reading may consist of the following parts:

All:	Lines one and two
Group 1:	Lines three and four
Group 2:	Line five
Group 3:	Lines six, seven and eight
Solo 1:	Lines nine, ten, eleven and twelve
Solo 2:	Lines thirteen, fourteen and fifteen
All:	Line sixteen

¹⁸ See Arna Bontemps, ed., American Negro Poetry (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 1. Only the first two stanzas of the poem are presented here, however, all six stanzas could be presented in an actual classroom setting. Used by permission.

This reading may be followed by a moment of silent reflection and small group discussions of the images, that may have emerged from the reading. Participants may also be asked to create (individually or as a group) a song, dance or prayer based on the poem.

Another way of exploring the dialogical process of education could be through a speech choir and a musical choir that would present Johnson's poem through music and speech. In this presentation the musical choir would sing the spirituals mentioned in the poem and the speech choir would recite the stanzas from the poem. Such a presentation may include the following:

Musical Choir: Sings "Steal Away"
 Speech Choir: Recites the first stanza
 Musical Choir: Sings "Roll Jordan Roll"
 Speech Choir: Recites the second and third stanzas
 Musical Solo: Sings "Nobody Knows the Trouble I See"
 Speech Choir: Recites the fourth and fifth stanzas
 Musical Choir: Sings "Go Down Moses"
 Speech Choir: Recites the sixth stanza
 Musical Choir: Sings "Swing Low Sweet Chariot"

The spirituals can inspire a dialogical approach to education that encourages active participation from everyone involved in the teaching/learning process.

(2) Imagination - The imagery in some of the spirituals is striking. The word pictures that emerge draw upon the imagination in such a way that the listener feels a sense of presence and involvement with the events portrayed in these songs. The spiritual "Somebody's

Knocking at Your Door," beautifully illustrates this point.

Somebody's knocking at your door,
Somebody's knocking at your door,
O sinner, why don't you answer?
Somebody's knocking at your door.¹⁹

The spirituals inspire us to embrace imagination as a viable mode of education. Maria Harris maintains that imagination is the "heart of teaching" and that it offers a wealth of possibilities for education.²⁰ These possibilities emerge as educators tap into the beauty, creativity and transformative power embodied in the imagination of human beings. Harris further argues that an artistic approach to education--drawing upon poetry, dance, metaphor, literature, pantomime, embodiment and creative dramatics--may facilitate deeper learning of conceptual material than a simple lecture or dialogue. She notes, for instance, that "a presentation of Fiddler on the Roof, . . . might teach more about the pain involved in commitment and conviction than a more discursive course."²¹

The spirituals also inspire an artistic approach to education. By drawing upon the imagination of the slaves we can explore a variety of artistic approaches that probe

¹⁹ "Somebody's Knocking at Your Door," in Songs of Zion, 154.

²⁰ Maria Harris, Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1987), 3-4, 19-22.

²¹ Maria Harris, Teaching and Religious Imagination, 171. For a broader discussion of how Harris uses the arts in education see pages 142-57, 163-70, 172.

deeply into the creative nature of the triple-heritage. For example, the spiritual "Calvary," which is a retelling of Jesus' crucifixion, may inspire an exploration of Jesus' death on the cross through a dramatic presentation.

Calvary, Calvary, Calvary,
Calvary, Calvary, Calvary,
Surely He died on Calvary.²²

This presentation could be held during Passion Week, in preparation for the Easter celebration.

In such a presentation the African aspect of the triple-heritage could be examined through the eyes of Simon of Cyrene, the African bystander, who was forced to carry the cross for Jesus (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26). The Original African Heritage Study Bible emphasizes the significance of Simon's African heritage and inspires a deeper exploration of the Black presence in the Bible.²³ This exploration may shed light on African culture, customs and practices during biblical times.

The African American aspect may be examined in the dramatic presentation through the slaves' identification with the suffering and death of Jesus. Since they understood what it was like to suffer, they were able to identify personally with Jesus and thus saw in their own situation the significance of the crucifixion.

²² "Calvary," in Songs of Zion, 87.

²³ Cain Hope Felder, ed. The Original African Heritage Study Bible (Nashville: James C. Winston Company, 1993), 1431, 1468, 1525-26.

Ev'ry time I think about Jesus,
 Ev'ry time I think about Jesus,
 Ev'ry time I think about Jesus,
 Surely He died on Calvary.²⁴

This examination may be expanded to a comparison of modern day issues plaguing African Americans and their current interpretation of the suffering and death of Jesus in light of these concerns.

Finally, the Christian aspect of the triple-heritage emerges through the retelling of the events surrounding Jesus' death.

Don't you hear the hammer ringing? . . .
 Don't you hear Him calling His Father? . . .
 Don't you hear Him say, "It is finished?" . . .²⁵

These themes may spark a comparative analysis of the passion accounts in the four Gospels. They may also inspire deeper reflection on the themes of love, forgiveness, suffering and sacrifice. The final two verses of "Calvary" speak to the result of the crucifixion and the human response to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus furnished my salvation. . . .
 Sinner, do you love my Jesus? . . .²⁶

The spirituals illustrate the value of imagination in the teaching-learning experience. They allow educators to explore a wealth of creative possibilities that can help to make the educational experience come alive.

²⁴ "Calvary," in Songs of Zion, 87.

²⁵ "Calvary," in Songs of Zion, 87.

²⁶ "Calvary," in Songs of Zion, 87.

(3) Spontaneity - One of the unique characteristics of the spirituals is spontaneity. As previously noted, the spirituals were created spontaneously during worship, during the work regime and as an expression of the slaves' innermost cares and concerns emerging from their living conditions. As the slaves endured a life of bondage, they shaped and reshaped the songs that sustained them through difficult times and inspired them to strive towards freedom and liberation.

Although spontaneity was a foundational characteristic of the spirituals during the time of slavery, it continued to be a strong quality of the spirituals even after the emancipation. Drawing upon the experience of Natalie Curtis Burlin, who deeply respected Negro music, Levine illustrates the influence of spontaneity in the creation of African American music. As Burlin participated in worship with a Negro congregation in rural Virginia, she recounts the following experience during a prayer service.

Minutes passed, long minutes of strange intensity. The mutterings, the ejaculations, grew louder, more dramatic, till suddenly I felt the creative thrill dart through the people like an electric vibration, that same half-audible hum arose,--emotion was gathering atmospherically as clouds gather--and then, up from the depths of some "sinner's" remorse and imploring came a pitiful little plea, a real "moan," sobbed in musical cadence. From somewhere in that bowed gathering another voice improvised a response: the plea sounded again, louder this time and more impassioned; then other voices joined in the answer, shaping it into a musical phrase; and so, before our ears, as one might say, from this molten metal of music a new song was smithied out,

composed then and there by no one in particular and by everyone in general.²⁷

The spontaneous nature of the spirituals, rooted in African tradition, can still be seen in African and African American music today. During my visits to South Africa in 1993 and 1995, I observed a number of connections between African and African American worship. One of the most striking similarities was the spontaneous nature of the music. For example, in many South African churches, persons within the congregation were free to begin a song and the entire congregation would join in singing, often creating new verses as they were led by the Spirit. This sense of spontaneity can also be seen in many African American churches. Although the choir director may begin a song during the devotional period, a deacon may create a new verse encouraging the congregation to continue in the spirit of worship. Another verse may be added by a preacher and still another, by a layperson in the pew. Thus, spontaneity calls the entire congregation to participate in the worship experience as the Spirit may lead. This sense of spontaneity inspired by the Holy Spirit is the basis of the spiritual "I'm Gonna Sing."

I'm gonna sing when the Spirit says a-Sing,
And obey the Spirit of the Lord.²⁸

²⁷ Natalie Curtis Burlin, "Negro Music at Birth," Musical Quarterly 5 (1919): 88, quoted in Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness, 26.

²⁸ "I'm Gonna Sing," in Songs of Zion, 81.

The African and African American aspects of the triple-heritage may be explored through a broader comparison of the spontaneous nature of music in both contexts. This exploration may lead to a deeper analysis of the commonalities that are still present in both African and African American traditions. This study may include historical, as well as a contemporary, analysis. The Christian aspect of the triple-heritage may include an examination of the role of the Holy Spirit in worship. Spirituals such as "I'm Gonna Sing" and "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit," can facilitate this examination.

Spontaneity not only engages the entire congregation in worship, but it may also encourage educators and learners to participate fully in the educational process by embracing each moment as an opportunity for learning. For example, a spontaneous approach to education may include listening to the reading of a traditional African prayer, "An African Canticle."

All you big things, bless the Lord.
 Mount Kilimanjaro and Lake Victoria,
 The Rift Valley and the Serengeti Plain,
 Fat baobabs and shady mango trees,
 All eucalyptus and tamarind trees,
 Bless the Lord.
 Praise and extol Him for ever and ever.
 All you tiny things, bless the Lord.
 Busy black ants and hopping fleas,
 Wriggling tadpoles and mosquito larvae,
 Flying locusts and water drops,
 Pollen dust and tsetse flies,
 Millet seeds and dried dagaa,
 Bless the Lord.

Praise and extol Him for ever and ever."²⁹

After the reading persons may be invited to add to the "Canticle" by creating their own psalm of praise and sharing it spontaneously either through movement, poetry, art or music.

Another example of spontaneity in education may include having persons pantomime a short story, a drawing or a song and then engaging them in a group discussion regarding the insights embodied in the mime. For example, two or three persons may be asked to silently read excerpts from Thomas Jones' narrative, "How I Learned to Read and Write."³⁰ Then they would be asked to mime the story acting out the script the way they remember it, adding their own insights, gestures, personalities and expressions. After the mime the entire group may be asked to identify with one of the characters and to express in one or two words a feeling, a symbol or a message that emerged in relation to that character. The words could, then, form the basis for further exploration and discussion of historical, contemporary and Christian themes that emerged throughout the mime.

(4) Rhythm - Rhythm is an integral part of the African American spirituals. As previously noted, the spirituals

²⁹ See An African Prayer Book, introduction by Desmond Tutu (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 7-8. Used by permission.

³⁰ See Thomas Jones' "How I Learned to Read and Write," in Steal Away: Stories of the Runaway Slaves, 73-80.

are not limited to one particular rhythm, but they embody a wide range of rhythm(s) (e.g., slow and plaintive, driving and pulsating, rigorous and jubilant), depending upon the type of spiritual.³¹ The spirituals "Certainly Lord," and "Ain't Dat Good News?" express high spirited jubilant rhythms, while the spirituals "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," and "I've Been 'Buked," reflect rhythms that are slow and plaintive. The spirituals remind us that rhythm is a natural part of our world. Rhythms which include the sunrise and sunset, the changing of the seasons, bodily rhythms, musical rhythms, historical rhythms and so forth, can be embraced as a viable part of the educational process.

Rhythm in the spirituals can help us to explore the African aspect of the triple-heritage by examining the significance of the drums, which were instrumental in establishing a sense of rhythm in African villages. Miles Mark Fisher notes that the drums of West Africa are the "oldest original rhythmic instruments." These instruments were specially crafted and used for various purposes in the African community.³² For example, the "ntumpane," or the "talking drums," were often made from the "skin of a female elephant's ear." These drums were unique in that they imitated the human voice and were typically used to transmit

³¹ Wyatt Walker, 54.

³² Fisher, 3.

important information such as danger, death, fire, a summons to arms or historical information."³³ An examination of African heritage may include a study of the talking drum, sacred rituals surrounding the crafting of the drum, the impact of the loss of the drum on African people, and the use of the drum in religious practices and rituals.

Although Africans transported to America were stripped of the drums, Jon Michael Spencer notes that the inner rhythms could not be stripped from African peoples. According to Spencer, rhythm was transported to the new world and continued to influence music, religious practices and the inner stirrings of African peoples in the diaspora. In his estimation, rhythm is the "African remnant of black religion in North America."³⁴

The African American aspect of the triple-heritage may be explored through a study of the "ring shout," which relied heavily on the various rhythms of the spirituals. The ring shout was a mode of religious expression, consisting of dancing, singing, shouting and spirit possession. Although the ring shout originated in Africa, it also was part of the worship experience of the slaves in America. William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware and Lucy McKim Garrison's description of the ring shout, commonly observed in South Carolina and other southern

³³ Fisher, 3.

³⁴ Spencer, Protest and Praise, 135-36.

states, reveals the significance of the spirituals to this unique religious celebration.

The true 'shout' takes place on Sundays or on 'praise'- nights through the week, and either in the praise-house or in some cabin. . . . The benches are pushed back to the wall, . . . and old and young, men and women, . . . all stand up in the middle of the floor, and when the 'sperichil' is struck up, begin first walking and by-and-by shuffling round, one after the other, in a ring. The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion, which agitates the entire shouter, . . . Sometimes they dance silently, sometimes as they shuffle they sing the chorus of the spiritual, and sometimes the song itself is also sung by the dancers. But more frequently a band, . . . of the best singers, . . . 'base' the others, singing the body of the song and clapping their hands together or on the knees.³⁵

The use of the spirituals to explore the ring shout may spark a broader examination of the role of dance in both contemporary African and African American churches. A reenactment of the ring shout, using such spirituals as "I'm Gonna Sing," and "Every Time I Feel the Spirit," may also facilitate a study of various elements of worship in the African American church, including singing, praising, preaching, dancing, shouting and fellowshiping.

The Christian aspect of the triple-heritage may be explored through a study of rhythm in the Bible, particularly through the poetry of the Psalms. This examination may spark a study of the instruments of worship in the Bible, the role of dance in the psalms, or the

³⁵ Allen, Ware and Garrison, xiii-xiv.

significance of shouting, singing and praising God as reflected in Psalms 98:4-6.

Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth;
Break forth and sing for joy and sing praises.
Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre;
With the lyre and the sound of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
Shout joyfully before the King, the LORD.³⁶

Rhythm may further inspire a comparative study of the spirituals and the Psalms, exploring various historical, theological, social and cultural themes.

Beyond worship, rhythm can also guide the practice of education. For example, educators may organize their curriculum around the rhythms of the seasonal African American holidays and celebrations (e.g., Kwanzaa, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, birthday and Black History Month). This would allow churches to emphasize various aspects of African and African American heritage during various parts of the year. Educators may also organize around the rhythms of the Christian calendar, (e.g., Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other special days). Various aspects of African, African American and Christian traditions can be explored during these seasons. Moreover, rhythm can be practiced in the designing of education by incorporating moments of quietness and activity, lamenting and celebrating and raising questions and sharing testimonies. These moments may be incorporated in prayer

³⁶ All scripture references are to the New American Standard Version.

meetings, Bible studies, organizational meetings, choir rehearsals and various gatherings of the church. For example, the opening devotion of a Deacon's meeting may include several moments of silence. Members may then be asked to share a word of praise and thanksgiving by reciting a litany. The devotion may close with a brief testimony from one or two deacons or with the singing of the spiritual "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah."

An example, of rhythm in an educational setting may include engaging persons in a five part meditation on the biblical story of Joshua's Victory at Jericho (Joshua 1-27). This meditation may include the following rhythmic phases.

- I. God's Instruction/Joshua Speaks to the People
 Reading of the text (vs. 1-7)
 Singing of the spiritual "Joshua Fit de
 Battle of Jericho"
 Silent reflection
 Discussion
- II. The March
 Reading of the text (vs. 8-14)
 Singing of the spiritual
 Silent reflection
 Discussion
- III. The Shout and the Victory
 Reading of the text (vs. 15-21)
 Singing of the spiritual
 Silent reflection
 Discussion
- IV. Rahab's Family is Spared
 Reading of the text (vs. 22-27)
 Singing of the spiritual
 Silent reflection
 Discussion
- V. Reenactment of the March
 Discussion and reflection on contemporary
 marches for civil rights in America and

against apartheid in South Africa
Closing reflection and prayer

(5) Narrative - Many spirituals tell the story of Biblical characters and/or events. Spirituals that possess this narrative quality include "Didn't It Rain," "Go Down Moses," "Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho," "Little David, Play on Your Harp," "Ezek'el Saw de Wheel," "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" "Wake Up! Jonah," and "Go Tell It On the Mountain." Narrative spirituals can be used to teach not only biblical stories but stories from various African and African American cultures and traditions. These spirituals may also spark a study of the hidden messages of bondage, hope and freedom embodied in some of these songs.

For example, the spiritual "Go Down Moses," is a narrative of the Exodus story. Through this spiritual we can explore the African aspect of the triple-heritage by examining the coded or hidden messages that emerge throughout the spiritual. For instance, since the slaves were not permitted to express openly their hopes for freedom, they masked their belief in liberation by adopting the Exodus story as their own.

When Israel was in Egypt's land: let my people go;
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, Let my
people go.
Go down, Moses, 'Way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole Pharaoh, Let my people go.³⁷

In reciting the Exodus story, the slaves established a

³⁷ "Go Down Moses," in Songs of Zion, 112.

covert form of resistance to their bondage. As Spencer notes, "behind the mask of the spirituals was authentic confrontation and conflict."²⁸ By examining the origins of coded messages, we can gain insight into African world view, customs, practices and beliefs.

"Go Down Moses," also helps us to explore the African American aspect of the triple-heritage by examining the slave's understanding of their own condition of bondage. This understanding can then be compared to the modern day challenges of racism, sexism, classism and poverty that continue to confront African Americans today. Finally, the Christian aspect of the triple-heritage can be explored through "Go Down Moses," by reflecting on the slaves' understanding of God. The spiritual reveals the slaves' identification with the children of Israel and communicates their belief in a God who identified with their suffering and who would one day liberate them from bondage.

Oh, let us all from bondage flee: Let my people
go;
And let us all in Christ be free, Let my people
go."

The theology of the slaves, as revealed through this spiritual, may also be analyzed in light of contemporary theological themes in the African American church.

Other possibilities for reflecting on the triple-

²⁸ Spencer, Protest and Praise, 13.

²⁹ "Go Down Moses," in Songs of Zion, 112.

heritage through the lens of narrative include: a study of African and African American heroes and heroines, and an exploration of the Christmas story as it is reflected in the spirituals.

Narrative through the spirituals reminds us of the importance of story in the educational process. Story can be a powerful mode of education because it allows persons not only to draw upon their own experience but to enter into the experience of others. Sharing stories can also be an effective way to explore other cultures, to engage in social critique and to inspire a sense of hope for the future. Finally, stories can encourage the creation of other stories. A variety of stories can be used in the practice of education. Such stories may include personal testimonies, autobiographies, biblical narratives, faith stories, heritage stories, folktales, poetry, fiction, historical accounts and conversations with others.

One way that narrative can be used in the practice of education is to have persons view a short clip from the movie "Amistad," where one of the imprisoned Africans, with no prior knowledge of the Bible, recounts the biblical story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. After viewing this clip persons may be asked to write or draw a story that reflects their understanding of God in relationship to those who are oppressed.

Another example of the narrative process of education

would be to invite people to create a collage of pictures, artifacts or other meaningful objects that tells the story of their faith journey. The collages and stories would then be shared in small group discussions.

(6) Nature - Howard Thurman reminds us that the world of nature is one of the primary sources of the spirituals.⁴⁰ In the spirituals, nature is used in at least two ways: as metaphor and as object lessons. The spiritual "Deep River," is an example of nature as metaphor.

Deep river, my home is over Jordan
 Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into
 campground.
 O don't you want to go to that gospel feast,
 That promis'd land where all is peace?"⁴¹

Thurman, McClain, Lovell and William Farley Smith all suggest that the image of the river, embodied in this spiritual may have represented a chance for both spiritual and earthly freedom.⁴² To cross the river "into campground," could have meant a new life for the slaves in Canada or in the northern states or it could have represented new life with Christ after death. As with many spirituals, the deeper message is coded or masked to conceal

⁴⁰ Thurman, 24-25.

⁴¹ "Deep River," in Songs of Zion, 115.

⁴² Thurman, 66; McClain, 103; Lovell, 330; William Farley Smith, Songs of Deliverance: Organ Arrangements and Congregational Acts of Worship for the Church Year Based on African American Spirituals (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 45-47.

the slaves deep yearnings for freedom."³

The spiritual "Keep A-Inchin' Along," illustrates nature as object lesson.

Keep a-inching along,
Jesus will come by and by.
Keep a-inching along,
like a poor inch worm,
Jesus will come by and by."⁴

The message embodied in this spiritual may be two fold. First, this spiritual may reflect a determination to keep pressing forward regardless of the trials and tribulations one may face. By pressing forward a little at a time, "like a poor inch worm," persons may eventually reach their ultimate goal. Second, the phrase "Jesus will come by and by," may indicate a sense of hope, courage and power that comes through Christ. As persons are persistent in their Christian journey, Christ can provide all that they need to complete the journey successfully.

The world of nature as reflected through the spirituals may inspire an examination of the use of metaphor and object lessons in African traditions. It may also facilitate a study of an African understanding of nature. For example Mbiti notes that Africans have a deep respect for nature and embrace it as a "friend of man and vice versa." Thus humans strive to live in harmony with nature acknowledging that the "destruction or pollution of nature" negatively impacts all

³ McClain, 103; Lovell, 330.

⁴ "Keep A-Inchin' Along," in Songs of Zion, 93.

of creation especially humanity.⁴⁵ Furthermore, an examination of nature through the spirituals may facilitate a study of African beliefs about God in light of their understanding of nature. The spiritual "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," may begin this reflection.

He's got the whole world in his hands, . . .
 He's got the wind and the rain in his hands, . . .
 He's got the little bitty baby in his hands, . . .
 He's got you and me sister, in His hands, . . .
 He's got you and me brother, in His hands, . .
 .⁴⁶

The spiritual "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," may also assist us in reflecting on the African American understanding of God through the lens of nature. This examination may spark a comparative analysis of contemporary African and African American world views and religious traditions. Another way that the African American heritage can be explored through nature in the spirituals is by reflecting on the use of metaphor and object lessons in African American communities and examining whether these elements are empowering or oppressive for African Americans. Finally, nature in the spirituals can assist us in examining ecological issues that are currently impacting African Americans and exploring some practical ways that African

⁴⁵ John S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 2nd ed. (1975; reprint, Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991), 44.

⁴⁶ "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," in Songs of Zion, 85. Dixon also adds the following phrases: "He's got the sun and the moon in his hands," and "He's got everybody in his hands," 110.

Americans can be empowered to address these issues.

The spirituals "He's God the Whole World in His Hands" and "God is a God" can assist us in exploring the Christian heritage by focusing our attention on the creation stories in Gen. 1:1-31; 2:1-25. These passages reveal God not only as the Sustainer but also as the Creator of the universe as the spiritual "God is a God" affirms.

He made the sun to shine by day, He made the sun
to show the way,
He made the stars to show their light, He made the
moon to shine by night,
The earth his footstool an' heav'n his throne, The
whole creation all His own,
His love an' power will prevail, His promises will
never fail."

Numerous questions may emerge from a study of creation: what can we learn about God through creation; what does it mean to be created in the image of God; what does the notion of being created in the image of God mean for African Americans; and how can an understanding of God as Creator and Sustainer affect African Americans' participation in the world?

Nature in the spirituals not only inspires an examination of the creation stories but it can also facilitate a study of the metaphors and object lessons that emerge throughout the Bible, with particular attention to the parables taught by Jesus that employ themes from nature. These parables may include the "Parable of the Seed" (Mark

" "God is a God," in Songs of Zion, 140.

4:26-29); the "Parable of the Mustard Seed" (Matt. 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19); the "Parable of the Four Soils" (Matt. 13:3-8; Mark 4:4-8; Luke 8:5-8); the "Parable of the Thistles" (Matt. 13:24-30) and the "Parable of the Fig Tree" (Luke 13:6-9). In these parables, nature is used to draw a comparison to the Kingdom of God or to teach an important spiritual truth.

Nature as part of the educational process can provide numerous possibilities for the practice of education. For example, in a retreat setting persons may be asked to meditate on a poem that focuses on nature such as Langston Hughes' poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."

I've known rivers:
 I've known rivers ancient as the world and older
 than the flow of human blood in human veins.
 My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
 I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
 I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to
 sleep.
 I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids
 above it.
 I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe
 Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen
 its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.
 I've known rivers:
 Ancient, dusky rivers.
 My soul has grown deep like the rivers."

After reflecting on the poem persons may be encouraged to walk through the camp ground in silence while African drums beat in the background. As they journey into the world of nature, persons could be asked to remember their ancestors

" See Bontemps, American Negro Poetry, 63. Used by permission.

and to reflect on parts of nature that have offered strength and hope for people of African descent. They would then be encouraged to write or draw a poem about an aspect of nature through which God's spirit touches them.

Another example of nature in the practice of education would be to have persons collect two or three items from a nature walk (e.g., broken branches, rocks, leaves, etc.) that represent aspects of nature that have been damaged or destroyed. These items could then be placed on an altar. This exercise could be followed by a study of Romans 8:22-24.

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees?

During the study persons could be asked to identify specific areas (e.g., contaminated rivers, waste dumps, etc.) that represent parts of creation that need to be healed and ways that they can participate in the healing of creation. This study may be concluded with a brief litany where persons are asked to recite one by one, "The earth groans for. . . ." Followed by a response from the entire group "Guide us Holy Spirit in the healing of the world."

(7) Ritual - Rituals play an important role in the life of Africans, African Americans and Christians. For

instance, Africans employ rituals to celebrate various aspects of life as they occur in families or in the community at large. Mbiti, in writing of Africa, notes that these events may include "the birth of a child, the giving of names, circumcision and other initiation ceremonies, marriage, funerals, harvest festivals, praying for rain, and many others."⁴ Many African Americans participate in special rituals during the celebration of Kwanzaa, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, Black History Month, and rites of passage ceremonies for African American youth. Finally, many Christians engage in various rituals during the observance of Baptism and Communion. Rituals are important because they draw communities together to celebrate special events and to support individuals as they move through various stages of their lives.

Since music is often an important accompaniment to ritual observances, the spirituals can facilitate us in examining various rituals in African, African American and Christian traditions. The spiritual "Wade in the Water," which is often used during baptism services in many African American churches may help us to examine African heritage by exploring baptism and cleansing rituals in African traditions. This examination may include a study of the origins of baptism and cleansing rituals in Africa, the significance of water in African traditions and the impact

⁴ Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 20.

of Christian rituals on African traditional religious practices.

"Wade in the Water," can also be used to explore African American heritage by examining at least three areas. First, this spiritual may spark a study of the controversy surrounding the baptism of slaves. As previously noted, many slave owners were reluctant to baptize slaves for fear that baptism would justify the slaves' freedom. Numerous laws were enacted to ensure the status of bondage whether or not slaves were baptized. Second, an examination of the coded message embedded in this spiritual may shed light on the meanings of the spiritual in the slave community. William Farley Smith notes that as a part of the "secret African slave cult," this spiritual probably had little significance for slave owners or for those outside of the slave community.⁵⁰ It is possible that this spiritual may have represented the slaves yearning for freedom and/or signaled an impending escape.

Wade in the water,
Wade in the water, children,
Wade in the water,
God's a-gonna trouble the water.⁵¹

Third, this spiritual may inspire a study of the symbol of water and how it was used in ritual ceremonies not only in the slave community but also in contemporary African

⁵⁰ William Farley Smith, Songs of Deliverance, 24.

⁵¹ "Wade in the Water," in Songs of Zion, 129.

American churches.

"Wade in the Water" can also facilitate our reflection on the Christian aspect of the triple-heritage through a study of baptism. This examination may generate questions such as what is baptism, how is baptism practiced in various denominations, and what does baptism symbolize. "Wade in the Water," not only stimulates an examination of baptism but also a study of another ordinance of the church, Holy Communion, focusing our attention on the biblical teachings, the symbols, and the meaning of the ritual. Finally, "Wade in the Water," may spark an examination of the biblical story of the sick man who stayed by the pool of Bethesda, waiting for an angel to "trouble the water" in hopes that he would be healed (John 5:2-9). This biblical passage inspired the chorus of this song, "God's a-gonna trouble the water."⁵² This examination may also include an analysis of the slaves' interpretation of the sick man's healing in light of their own condition of slavery and hope for freedom.

"Wade in the Water," stimulates further discussion on the liberation themes from the Exodus story that appear in the verses.

See that band all dressed in white
The leader looks like an Israelite.
See that band all dressed in red

⁵² "Wade in the Water," in Songs of Zion, 129.

It looks like the band that Moses led.⁵³

These themes may suggest further study of the slaves' understanding of God and Jesus as Deliverer and Liberator. This study may also include a comparison of contemporary theological themes related to God and Jesus in the African American church with those of the slave community.

Ritual embodied in the spirituals reminds us that the ritualistic process of education can be an effective way to guide the teaching/learning experience. For example, ritual may be used to gather persons together at the beginning of a learning session in order to prepare them for the session, and/or it may be used at the end of the session as a way to bring closure to the overall experience. An opening ritual for a learning session based on spiritual gifts may consist of having persons meditate on the following statement by Maya Angelou.

While I know myself as a creation of God, I am also obligated to realize and remember that everyone else and everything else are also God's creation.⁵⁴

As a candle is passed throughout the group persons may be asked to reflect on who they are as gifted persons created by God. They would also be asked to identify at least one gift that they believe God has given to them and how they

⁵³ "Wade in the Water," in Songs of Zion, 129.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Diane J. Johnson, Proud Sisters: The Wisdom and Wit of African-American Women (White Plains, N.Y.: Peter Pauper Press, 1995), 27.

might use that gift in the church as well as in the African American community. Finally, persons would be asked to write a brief prayer of dedication and to share it with another person in the group.

A closing ritual for the same learning session may include having persons stand in a circle and pass a candle to the person next to them saying, "may your gifts be a blessing to all of God's people." After each person has recited this phrase the entire group would respond by saying, "thank you God for the gift of your people." Everyone would then be asked to join in singing the spiritual "This Light of Mine."

This little light of mine, I'm goin' to let it
shine. . . .
Everywhere I go, I'm goin' to let it shine. . . .
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."⁵⁵

Ritual can also guide the teaching/learning process through meditation, prayer, imaging and communal celebration. For example, a learning experience designed to remember African and African American ancestors may move through the following phases while African music and drumming is softly playing in the background.

- I. Remembering and Mourning
Persons would be invited to meditate silently during the reading of three or four excerpts from African and African American ancestors.
- II. Symbols of Remembrance
Persons would be asked to create a symbol of remembrance in honor of an ancestor who has

⁵⁵ "This Little Light of Mine," in Songs of Zion, 132.

special meaning for them.

II. Communal Sharing

Individuals would be invited to share their symbols with the group and then place them on an altar in the center of the room.

IV. Celebration in Song and Dance

Everyone would be invited to join in singing a song of praise and celebration for the gift of their ancestors. During the song the group would be guided through a series of dance movements.

V. Closing Prayer

Everyone in the group would be asked to form a circle and to give a closing prayer consisting of one to three words (e.g., Blessings, We remember, Praise!, Go in peace).

This discussion has shown that the spirituals offer a wealth of possibilities for exploring the triple-heritage through content and process.

Curriculum Sources and Resources. What kind of curriculum sources and resources are needed for a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model? Drawing upon insights from our study in Chapters 1-6, effective sources and resources must fully embody the triple-heritage and be guided by the content and process that emerges through the spirituals as well as the three streams of the heritage.

Summary and Conclusion

The primary concern of this study has been that African Americans are in danger of losing various aspects of their heritage, particularly since many African American churches have embraced models of Christian education that do not fully reflect the triple-heritage. Therefore, the

educational ministry of the African American church can be enlarged by a model of Christian education that embodies and explores the triple-heritage through the African American spirituals.

A tri-collaborative triple-heritage model of Christian education can benefit the church in several ways. First of all, this model of Christian education will allow African Americans to celebrate their full heritage as Africans, African Americans and Christians. It does not reject one's cultural heritage in support of their faith heritage nor does it reject one's faith heritage in support of one's cultural heritage. Instead it values the insights that emerge from all aspects of one's heritage. Second, it allows African Americans to have a sense of self-esteem and pride in who they are as African Americans. This sense of self-worth can assist African Americans in valuing who they are and inspire them to become productive members of society. Third, a tri-collaborative triple-heritage model of Christian education will allow African Americans to draw from the sources that naturally emerge from African and African American culture (e.g., music, dance, ritual, folklore, etc.) as viable sources for celebrating, expressing and teaching their faith. While there are numerous resources that could inform a curriculum that centers around the triple-heritage, this model focuses on the African American spirituals because they embody the

triple-heritage and they provide a means for exploring the content and participating in the process of this rich heritage.

In this chapter we have explored a variety of ways that the spirituals can be used to enlarge Christian education in the African American church. The purpose of this chapter was simply to begin this reflection. The next step, however, would be to examine what a curriculum grounded in the triple-heritage and based on the spirituals would look like. Although this task is beyond the scope of this dissertation, my recommendation for further research is to begin the process of building a curriculum that is grounded in the triple-heritage and informed by the spirituals, and to study the effectiveness of this curriculum for the African American church.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, the African American church has been instrumental in establishing educational institutions and promoting the formal education of African American people. In recent years, however, the emphasis of Christian education as an ongoing comprehensive ministry within the church has declined. While some churches are making some strides in this area, many are still lagging behind. In order to reverse this trend, the African American church must take an active role in developing a comprehensive Christian education ministry that addresses the holistic needs of the African American community. This goal can only be achieved if the educational ministry of the church makes a concerted effort to go beyond the walls of the church, identify the relevant concerns of the community and design appropriate programs that will speak to these concerns.

One way that the church can provide a holistic approach to Christian education is through a broad-based Christian education ministry that reflects the triple-heritage throughout the curriculum. This dissertation has shown that the spirituals can be a viable source for teaching the triple-heritage. The spirituals allow African Americans to reflect on their African roots, their African American experience and their Christian faith. Furthermore, they allow African Americans to reflect on social issues while challenging them to strive for positive change and

transformation. The spirituals also inspire the church to examine the relationship between theology and Christian education in order to provide an educational program that is relevant and speaks to the needs of African American people. Finally, the spirituals inspire the church to participate in the movement of the Holy Spirit in order to facilitate Spirit-centered education, which empowers persons to deepen their relationship with God and thus carry out the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Christian education from an African American perspective must undergird all aspects of the church with the liberating message of Jesus Christ. It must lift up the rich heritage of the African American culture and empower African Americans to take an active role in their quest for liberation. Drawing upon the wisdom inherent within the spirituals, this valuable resource, that arises out of the unique experience of African American people, can facilitate the church in teaching the triple-heritage and thus enhance the overall educational ministry of the African American church.

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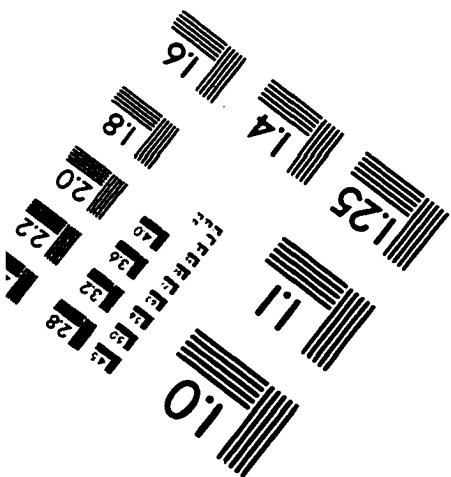
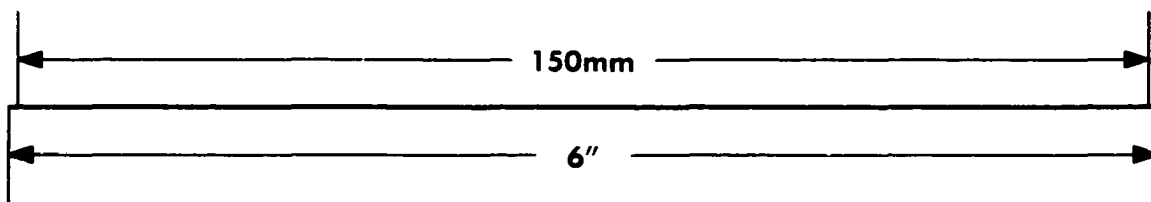
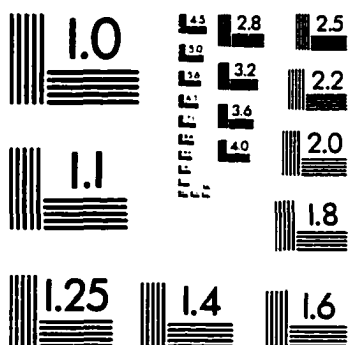
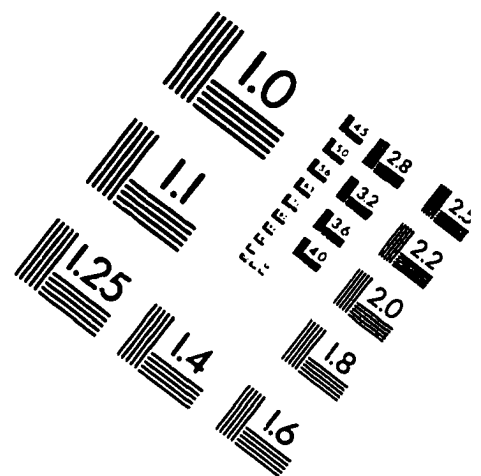
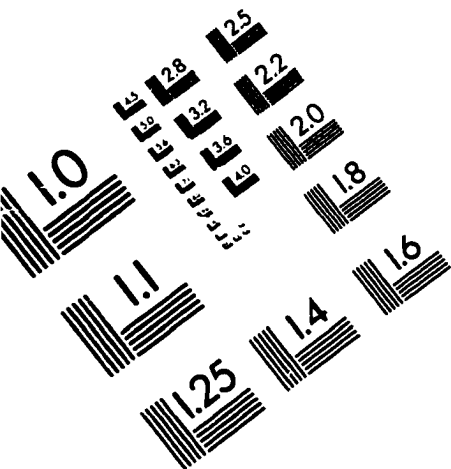
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